

21ST APRIL 2022

REPORT OF THE ASSISTANT DIRECTOR, GROWTH AND REGENERATION

Environmental Health staffing proposals

EXEMPT INFORMATION

None.

PURPOSE

To agree proposals to enhance the staffing of the Environmental Health Team to enable the team to recover from Covid 19 workload over the last two years and return to statutory duties.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Committee-

1. Approve the proposed staffing structure as set out in this report.
2. Authorise the Chief Executive to implement the changes.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since March 2020 the Environmental Health team have seen an exponential increase in workload as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. As well as enforcing the various lockdowns/Tier restrictions for different business sectors the team have also been commissioned by Staffordshire County Council to investigate outbreaks of Covid-19 in local workplaces. At the same time the team has continued to provide critical services including high-risk food hygiene inspections/complaints, taxi and alcohol licence applications, noise/odour complaints and planning consultations.

The work in relation to Covid-19 has been carried out by all officers within the team at the height of the pandemic at the expense of their own statutory work including but not limited to routine food hygiene inspections and public health inspections. As the situation with Covid-19 eases it is necessary to ensure that specifically Environmental Health Officers return to their substantive duties. There is a significant back log of food hygiene and licensing inspections to carry out and those that have been visited are requiring significant intervention to bring them up to standard. In addition there is a back log of routine checks and audits in relation to taxi licensing. There are also a number of licensing contracts, policies and procedures which need renewing, retendering, and revising.

The Proposal

- to appoint a temporary Senior Licensing Officer for 18months;
- extend both the secondment of a Technical Support Officer for a further 12 months to March 2024 and to pay an essential car user allowance;
- extend the contract of the Covid-19 Officer until 10th October 2023; and

- Approve the replacement of the vacant temporary environmental health officer for 12 months.

Temporary Senior Licensing Officer:

At present the licensing section of the team has a flat structure with three officers reporting directly to the Head of Service. It is proposed that the introduction of a Senior Licensing Officer would have supervisory responsibility of the licensing staff providing them with technical support and supervision. In addition this post would be responsible for reviewing, renewing and retendering contracts, policies and procedures many of which are overdue and again relieve current Environmental Health staff who have been tasked with some of these duties so that they can concentrate on addressing overdue regulatory inspections. With the addition of this post it is also envisaged that the licensing team could undertake a body of proactive work including resurrecting the Responsible Authorities Group, working closely with partners by carrying out enforcement inspections of taxis and licensed premises with both the police, trading standards and the Security Industry Agency (SIA). This post is a Grade G and will be temporary for 18 months.

Extension of Technical Support Officer:

The Technical Support Officers main duties include but are not limited to assisting in the processing of Environmental Health, Licensing and other related applications and complaints/service requests, including checking of the validity of information, input of data onto the Northgate database, sending out related correspondence and processing of associated fees/reminders. Assistance with production of taxi vehicle plates and driver license badges and development of Northgate database to expedite annual Licensing Fee administration. The extension of the secondment of this post would assist in addressing the back log of licensing checks and support the two substantive licensing posts with administration and relieve the Licensing Officer of some duties to work on the migration of licensing to Assure.

Currently this post has not been allocated an essential car user allowance yet the officer has a role which necessitates the use of a vehicle to provide some services we are expecting them to deliver. The post therefore needs amending to add this allowance. This post is a Grade E and will be temporary for a further 12 months.

Extension of Covid 19 officer post:

Extending the term of the Covid-19 Officer post would allow Covid-19 issues to continue to be addressed while enabling commercial officers to return to their substantive duties and focus on their statutory responsibilities in relation to food, health and safety and public health and to clear the backlog created by Covid and priorities stipulated by Government. Should the work in relation to Covid-19 reduce it is anticipated this post could also provide support by assisting with other Environmental Health duties. This post is a Grade E and remain temporary until October 2023

Temporary Environmental Health Officer:

With regards to the vacant temporary EHO post, this post was previously approved by the Appointments and Staffing Committee in July 2021 which was recruited to however the post holder left the post after successfully applying for a permanent position. Due to the current Covid-19 Outbreak workload and subsequent back log of programmed public health inspections it is proposed to fill this temporary role with an EHO who can lead on addressing the inspection backlog. This post is a Grade G and will remain temporary until 31 March 2023.

Finances

It is proposed that all of these posts would be funded from the Covid-19 grant provided by Staffordshire County Council and Central Government to support the pandemic response and ensure critical services continue.

The total cost of the proposal is £260,393 This can be funded from Environmental health's remaining containing outbreak management funding of £266,000.

	2022/23	2023/24	Total
Temporary Senior Licensing Officer – Grade G	£47,252	£24,217	£71,469
Technical Support Officer incl £1200 car allowance – Grade E	£36,946	£37,840	£74,786
Covid 19 officer – Grade E	£35,746	£22,901	£58,647
Temporary Environmental Health Officer – Grade G	£47,252		£47,252
Out of hours service to March 2023	£8,239		£8,239
Total			£260,393
Funding			£266,000

RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

The proposed temporary posts and extension to posts will be funded entirely by the Covid-19 grant funding provided by Staffordshire County Council and Department of Health and Social Care. Technical support officer will return to substantive role upon completion of this temporary employment.

LEGAL/RISK IMPLICATIONS

If the Environmental Health systems and Northgate database are not adequately supervised and developed, there is a risk that statutory returns to central government will not be submitted, and this could also affect our operation of the national Food Hygiene rating scheme. Robust systems are also required for General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) requirements. Failure to have these systems in place could cause a risk of legal action against the Council as well as reputational damage. The authority is also under a statutory duty to inspect registered food premises. The longer premises remain operational with an overdue inspection the more likely the risk of a serious food poisoning incident or outbreak. In addition failure to carry out routine checks on current licensed taxi drivers and premises could result in serious risk to public safety.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

None.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

None.

REPORT AUTHOR

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LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS**APPENDICES**

None.