

**RESOURCE DIRECTORATE – AUDIT SERVICES
ADDITIONAL RESOURCE****1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek approval for the creation of a combined Freedom of Information and Benefit Fraud clerical post within the Audit Services unit of the Resource Directorate.
- 1.2 Full funding is available for this post but as it will increase the Council's existing employee establishment, formal approval is required from Cabinet before recruitment can be undertaken.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The background is considered in two parts a) Freedom of Information Act 2000 requirements and b) Benefit Fraud:
- 2.2 Freedom of Information:
- 2.2.1 The requirement for additional resources to support the implementation of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 was set out in the preliminary restructuring of the Resources Directorate in January 2003.
- 2.2.2 In summary the corporate responsibilities for the implementation of the scheme vests in the Senior Auditor & Data Protection Officer (Audit Services) and P/T Solicitor (Legal & Democratic Services). Further support is required both at Corporate and Directorate level to administrate the Publication Scheme and undertake fundamental records management reviews.
- 2.3 Background – Benefit Fraud:
- 2.3.1 The service has maintained an excellent performance record in the prevention and detection of fraud but has kept its resources to a minimum. There are currently two investigators and one fraud assistant managing this high profile service.
- 2.3.2 Best Value benchmarking studies determine that measured against the annual spend on Council Tax and Housing Benefit (in excess of £28m with 9,000 claimants) the fraud resources committed to the service in this Council are low compared to other local authorities.
- 2.3.3 The detection of benefit fraud and identification of fraudulent overpayments, together with the maximisation of additional Government sanction rewards (that is income to the Council) are directly proportional to the amount of resources allocated to the process
- 2.3.4 A recent Continuous Performance Assessment (CPA) and Benefit Fraud Inspectorate Review (BFI) shows this Council to have achieved 96 out of 105 set standards but with potential to further improve. To assist in maximising this potential and generating further income for the Council the following proposal is made;

3. PROPOSAL FOR ADDITIONAL RESOURCE

- 3.1 To create a full time post to provide required support to the Freedom of Information Act process as specified, and to provide clerical support to the Fraud Unit. This will free up the existing Fraud Assistant from clerical duties to undertake specific fraud investigations in support of the existing fraud officers.
- 3.2 Funding (Financial Implications) for the proposal is outlined below.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 Following the restructuring of Audit Services earlier this year (in response to the promotion of the Principal Auditor to Assistant Director - Commercial Services) there is some funding capacity within existing salaries budget. Together with the allocation from Resources Administration Services the proposals does not require additional funding.
- 4.2 With additional resources focussed on benefit fraud investigation, the scope for increasing Government sanction rewards and subsidies is significant. Based on existing performance the proposal should result in additional subsidies to the Council of at least £16,000.

5. ENVIRONMENTAL AND CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The proposal should enhance the Council's current level of benefit fraud prevention and detection and reduce the level of crime accordingly.

6. PORTFOLIO HOLDERS COMMENTS

- 6.1 The Portfolio Holder supports the addition of this post.

7. EMPLOYEE SIDE COMMENTS

- 7.1 The Employee Side supports the addition of this post.

8. RECOMMENDATION

- 8.1 That Members approve the creation of the new clerical post within Audit Services of the Resource Directorate.

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Background Papers:

None

