

RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL REPORT TO PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Agenda Item No.

meeting date: 11 FEBRUARY 2016
title: LANCASHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL PROVISION OF SERVICES
submitted by: DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICES
principal author: JOHN MACHOLC, HEAD OF PLANNING SERVICES

1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To inform Members of some of the changes envisaged in relation to the service provision of Lancashire County Council for the planning function of Ribble Valley Borough Council.
- 1.2 Members will be aware of the financial cuts envisaged by Lancashire County Council and as a result they have indicated a reduction in the service to be provided to the Borough Council in relation to the planning function and possible cessation of other services, including the countryside service.
- 1.2 Relevance to the Council's ambitions and priorities
 - Community Objectives – to be a well managed Council providing efficient services.
 - Corporate Priorities - None.
 - Other Considerations - None.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 In relation to the development management function and the policy function of the planning service, the Council has utilised Lancashire County Council in obtaining advice and information in relation to evidence for the Core Strategy and associated documents as well as information and advice on specific planning applications. This has included advice on archaeology, ecology and agricultural advice where appropriate and most of this has been funded by either a service level agreement or a fee based on an individual request.
- 2.2 The County Council stopped the provision of ecology advice to Local Planning Authorities in March 2015.
- 2.3 The County Council is proposing to close the Historic Environment Service on 31 March 2016. Currently an option is being explored where a private consultancy service will offer advice to Local Planning Authorities with Lancashire County Council hosting the records.
- 2.2 The Council has recently received a consultation pro forma in relation to the County Council's budget proposal to close the countryside service by 2018. In the letter they indicate that it could affect the maintenance of the county parks and in Ribble Valley this would include Spring Wood (Whalley) and Marles Wood. The document invites comments on the proposal.

3 ISSUES

- 3.1 It is clear that Service Provision has already been reduced and the Council no longer provides an ecology service. It is evident that in the foreseeable future, both the archaeological advice and rural estates advice as well as the cessation of the countryside service, will no longer be provided.
- 3.2 In many respects, the Council's inability to obtain such advice could potentially lead to significant issues in the determination of planning applications that have the requirement to obtain such information. Although some of the advice can be obtained from existing staff, it may be necessary to consider the appointment of specialist advisors on certain issues such as archaeology and agricultural advice. Whereas previously the pooled use of resources has enabled a cost saving, I would anticipate that a requirement on a site for site basis would lead to an increase in cost for the Council.
- 3.3 I can advise Members that ongoing discussion is taking place with other Lancashire districts as to cost sharing but as an interim basis I anticipate greater costs.

4 RISK ASSESSMENT

- 4.1 The approval of this report may have the following implications
- Resources – Additional cost of the authority to enable provision of certain advice.
 - Technical, Environmental and Legal – No implications identified.
 - Political - No implications identified.
 - Reputation – No implications identified.
 - Equality & Diversity – No implications identified.

5 CONCLUSION

- 5.1 That Committee note this report and be advised that the Council will continue to explore the options for such services and seek best value in all cases.

JOHN MACHOLC
HEAD OF PLANNING SERVICES

JOHN HEAP
DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICES

BACKGROUND PAPERS

www.lancashire.gov.uk/haveyoursay
Letter dated 5/1/16 – Public consultation – Cessation of the countryside service.

For further information please ask for John Macholc, extension 4502.

REF: JM/EL/P&D/11/2/16