

PERSONNEL COMMITTEE

9 June 2003

CABINET

11 June 2003

FINANCE DEPARTMENT – PROPOSAL FOR AN INVESTIGATIONS TEAM LEADER

REPORT OF DIRECTOR OF FINANCE

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RECENT REFERENCES:

PER39: Finance Department - Proposal for a Training & Quality Officer, 5 February 2003

CEN10: Benefits Performance Standards, 20 November 2002

CAB253: Review of Finance Department Staffing Structure, 3 October 2001

CAB460: Partial Review of Finance Department Staffing Structure, 18 September 2002

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The purpose of this report is to bring forward proposals for an additional post of an Investigations Team Leader for the Benefits Section within the Finance Department and to seek an increase in the approved establishment of 1 FTE.

Over recent years the prevention and detection of benefit fraud has been given a high profile nationally. Investigations work is both sensitive and complex. The team is enthusiastic and has performed well. However, if further resources are made available to support and direct the team it is considered that performance could improve further.

This post has yet to be formally evaluated but an initial assessment has indicated that it would fall within Scale 5, the same as the other Team Leader posts within the Section.

The funding for the new post will come from the Weekly Incorrect Benefit Scheme (WIBS).

RECOMMENDATIONS:

To Personnel Committee:

- 1 That the Finance Department establishment be increased by 1 FTE for the post of Investigations Team Leader.

To Cabinet:

- 2 That a virement of £24,000 from WBS to the Finance salary budget for 2003/04 be approved.
- 3 That the increase in the Finance base salary budget (£36,000 full year) be approved.

PERSONNEL COMMITTEE9 June 2003CABINET11 June 2003FINANCE DEPARTMENT – PROPOSAL FOR AN INVESTIGATIONS TEAM LEADERReport of Director of FinanceDETAIL:1 Introduction

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to bring forward proposals for an additional post of an Investigations Team Leader for the Benefits Section within the Finance Department and to seek an increase in the approved establishment of 1 FTE.

2 Current Structure

- 2.1 The current structure is shown in Appendix A and the proposed structure in Appendix B. In summary they are as follows

	Current FTEs	Proposed FTEs
Head of Revenues	1	1
Benefits	21	22
Taxation	15	15
Administration	5.61	5.61
Exchequer	8.36	8.36
Total	50.97	51.97

- 2.2 Cabinet approved the current structure in October 2001 when a full review of the Finance Department was carried out. Further changes were made in September 2002 to provide additional resources in the Benefits Section to deal with the introduction of Tax and Pension Credits, and an additional post was also created within the Investigations and Visiting Team. In February 2003 a new post of Training & Quality Officer was created within the Benefits Section following a successful bid to the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) for performance Standards Funding.

3 Investigations Team Leader

- 3.1 Over recent years the prevention and detection of benefit fraud has been given a high profile nationally. The DWP has modified the schemes that local authorities must operate with emphasis on fraud prevention via the implementation of the verification framework. The detection of fraud is encouraged by the provision of subsidy based on the number of sanctions and prosecutions that are undertaken.

- 3.2 Investigations work is both sensitive and complex. Cases are prosecuted under the Theft Act and the Social Security Administration Act. The staff must operate under the requirements of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act and the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act. At the same time they must ensure that they adhere to the Council's Policy Guidelines.
- 3.3 The team is enthusiastic and has performed well. However, if further resources are made available to support and direct the team it is considered that performance could improve further. There are four members of staff in the team currently and they all report to the Benefits Manager directly. The Benefits Manager dedicates as much time as possible to the Investigations Team but has identified that there is scope for much more work in this area. If a new post of Team Leader is added to the structure this will provide the additional resources necessary to manage the team more effectively and will relieve the pressure on the Benefits Manager.
- 3.4 There are considerable accommodation pressures within the Revenues area and this post will work flexibly with the others in the team to share desks and operate from home as appropriate. In addition, further investigation is being undertaken into the possibility of additional accommodation more generally for the Council. This post has yet to be formally evaluated but an initial assessment has indicated that it would fall within Scale 5, the same as the other Team Leader posts within the Section.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:

4 CORPORATE STRATEGY (RELEVANCE TO):

- 4.1 The proposals accord with the key priorities of the Council's Corporate Strategy, in particular: *To raise performance standards in key areas of the Council's work to meet national standards and targets where these are set; and To maintain budget stability through strong performance and resource management while accommodating the requirements of new legislation and duties.*

5 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

- 5.1 The proposed increase in establishment will require an increase in the base budget and salary ceiling as follows:

On-going costs	2003/04 Three points below top of scale * £	Full Year Top of scale £
Investigations Team Leader	15,000	27,500
Add on-costs @ 20%	3,000	5,500
Car provision	3,000	3,000
Total on-going costs	21,000	36,000
One-off costs		
Recruitment	2,000	
Equipment	1,000	
Total	3,000	

*assumes that new member of staff is appointed with effect from September

- 5.2 An experienced officer will be sought for this post and, consequently, it is likely that the appointment will be made some way up the scale. This is reflected in the costs shown above.
- 5.3 The funding will come from the Weekly Incorrect Benefit Scheme (WIBS). The WIBS was introduced in April 2002. The Council receives income for cases where an amount of incorrect benefit is identified. Income is also received for certain formal actions taken associated with prosecution cases. £79,200 was received in 2002/03 and it is estimated that £103,000 will be received in the current year, against a budget of £74,000. In September 2002 Cabinet approved the use of the budget of £74,000 to fund additional staffing posts within the Finance Department. The remainder of this income, £29,000, will be used to fund the cost of the additional post in 2003/04.
- 5.4 It is likely that the additional post will generate more income from subsidy due to an increase in the level of sanctions applied in future years. For example, a successful prosecution generates £3,200 additional subsidy. These sources of reduced expenditure and additional income will be used to finance the additional full year costs from 2004/05 onwards.
- 5.5 The funding of this post assumes that the WIBS scheme continues as at present and Members are asked to approve a permanent increase in the base salaries budget funded from this income. If there are changes to the WIBS scheme in future the funding of the posts will be reviewed and the implications of this will be reported to Members as appropriate.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:

Working papers held in the Finance Department

APPENDICES:

Appendix A: Revenues and Exchequer Current Structure

Appendix B: Revenues and Exchequer Proposed Structure