

Item: 13

Development and Infrastructure Committee: 10 November 2020.

Building Standards – Staffing Resource.

Report by Executive Director of Development and Infrastructure.

1. Purpose of Report

To consider establishing the temporary post of Assistant Technician in the Building Standards function on a permanent basis.

2. Recommendations

The Committee is invited to note:

2.1.

That the Council has been appointed by the Scottish Government to undertake verification duties in terms of the Building (Scotland) Act 2003, with the primary function being to protect the public interest by providing an independent check of applications for building warrant to construct or demolish buildings.

2.2.

That the cost of providing the verification service is covered by building warrant related fees.

2.3.

The increased pressures placed on the verification service as a result of the increased technical complexity of Building Standards, the additional workload required by the Verification Performance Framework and by ongoing investment required to support delivery of e-Building Standards.

2.4.

That, in order to deal with the increased workload referred to above, a temporary post of Assistant Technician (Building Standards) was established in January 2019.

2.5.

The proposal to establish the temporary post of Assistant Technician (Building Standards) on a permanent basis, to continue to provide technical support to enable the effective and efficient operation of the Building Standards function, including monitoring submissions received via the e-Building Standards portal, administration of non-current records and updating the electronic document and records management systems.

2.6.

That costs associated with making the temporary post of Assistant Technician (Building Standards) permanent can be met within existing resources.

It is recommended:

2.7.

That the temporary full-time post of Assistant Technician (Building Standards), G5, be established on a permanent basis.

3. Background

3.1.

The Building (Scotland) Act 2003 and associated legislation set out the role of verifiers in the Scottish building standards system. Their primary function is to protect the public interest by providing an independent check of applications for building warrant to construct or demolish buildings, to provide services, fittings or equipment in buildings, or to convert buildings. This includes checking during the design phase before granting a building warrant and checking during the construction phase before accepting a completion certificate.

3.2.

The Council was appointed as a building standards verifier to undertake verification duties under the Building (Scotland) Act 2003 for a period of six years, commencing 1 May 2005. Reappointment followed for an additional six years to 30 April 2017, and a further appointment commenced on 1 May 2017 for a six year period up to 30 April 2023.

3.3.

Appointment to undertake verification duties is based on the Council continuing to satisfy Scottish Ministers that it continues to meet performance targets. Poor performance could trigger Scottish Government audit of the service or amendment to the period of verification appointment.

3.4.

Local authority verification duties have increased significantly in recent years as a result of the increased technical complexity of the Building Standards, the additional inspection workload required by the Verification Performance Framework and more recently by the ongoing investment required to support the implementation of e-Building Standards.

3.5.

The building warrant related fees are intended to cover the cost of providing the verification service. Building warrant fees, which are set nationally by the Scottish Government, were increased on 1 July 2017 – the first increase since 2004..

3.6.

In announcing the fee increase, the Minister for Local Government and Housing indicated that he would expect the additional fee income to be reinvested in improving local authority Building Standards verification services. Following this announcement, the Scottish Government has also indicated that they will be examining how local authorities use the fee income to ensure that fees paid for building warrants are not being used to subsidise other Council services.

4. Proposed Post

4.1.

In order to deal with the increasing workload pressures, a temporary post of Assistant Technician (Building Standards) was established in 2019 for an initial period of 12 months. The purpose of the role was to provide technical support to enable the effective and efficient operation of the Building Standards function, including monitoring submissions received via the e-Building Standards portal, administration of non-current records and updating the electronic document and records management systems (EDRMS). A job description for the post is attached as Appendix 1 to this report. The post was filled from 16 February 2019, with a further 12 months' extension approved until 15 February 2021.

4.2.

At the time the post was established there was no technical support provided within the Building Standards team and, as a result (a) essential procedural checking and processing work was being undertaken by more senior professional team members, impacting on overall efficiency and productivity; and (b) necessary tasks to sort and electronically archive or destroy historic building warrant records as required by the Council's Records Management Plan were not being undertaken.

4.3.

As a result of the new post crucial procedural checking and processing work is now being undertaken at technician level, freeing more senior professional team members to concentrate on more advanced disciplines, including technical assessment of building warrant applications and completion certificate submissions.

4.4.

Commencement of back scanning hard copy paper applications to allow electronic processing has increased overall efficiency and productivity of the service, with digital recording of historic building warrant records supporting delivery of the statutory electronic Building Standards Register and the Council's Records Management Plan.

4.5.

To provide an indication of the current technician workload, there are currently in the region of 450 file boxes containing non-current Building Warrant paper files dating back to 1948 held in archive storage. All of these files require to be electronically registered, in certain circumstances (important buildings and warrants less than 25 years since completion), and back scanned to meet the Council's statutory responsibility under Section 24 of the Building (Scotland) Act 2003.

4.6.

Retention of the current post is therefore considered essential due to the continuing high workload pressures placed on the verification service. Additional building warrant fee income will also be due to the service from 1 April 2021 onwards as a result of the service biennial review of the Estimated Build Costs, on which the fees are based.

5. Human Resource Implications

5.1.

The post of Assistant Technician (Building Standards) has an approved job description and person specification, attached as Appendix 1 to this report, and is graded at G5, with a salary range from SCP (spinal column point) 21 (£21,652) to SCP 25 (£23,440), including Distant Islands Allowance.

5.2.

Should the recommendation be accepted, and the post made permanent, then the post will need to be advertised accordingly.

5.3.

Should the recommendation not be accepted, then the current postholder could continue in the current role until the end of their current temporary contract and would then revert to their substantive permanent post with the Council from which they are currently seconded.

6. Corporate Governance

This report relates to the Council complying with governance and its duties as an employer and therefore does not directly support and contribute to improved outcomes for communities as outlined in the Council Plan and the Local Outcomes Improvement Plan.

7. Financial Implications

7.1.

The cost of the temporary post of Assistant Technician (Building Standards) is £27,700 for financial year 2020/21, based on a current staff cost range of £27,300 to £29,700.

7.2.

On the basis that the temporary appointment was originally funded as a service pressure bid through the Council's budget setting process, this means that the Building Service function is currently being subsidised by General Fund Services.

7.3.

A summary analysis of Building Standards in recent years shows how this function has performed in financial terms:

	2017/18 Actuals £000's	2018/19 Actuals £000's	2019/20 Actuals £000's	2020/21 Budget £000's
Expenditure	298.9	273.2	293.9	314.9
Income	403.0	312.0	315.9	304.7
(Surplus)/Deficit	(104.1)	(38.8)	(22.0)	10.2

7.4.

Notwithstanding that additional central support service are recorded at a Service wide level, in simple terms the analysis indicates that, over the last three years, the Building Standards function has successfully operated at a surplus. The addition of the temporary staff resource in 2019/20 did however result in a net deficit budget of £10,200 being approved for financial year 2020/21 as expenditure was predicted to exceed income levels. The Building Standards function will have to either increase its fee income or reduce its cost base going forward if it is to achieve a breakeven position going forward.

7.5.

For the first half of financial year 2020/21, to 30 September 2020, the function returned a net surplus of £6,000 which is £5,600 ahead of the profiled budget position. The report also indicates that a review of building warrant fee levels is due in April 2021, which should be sufficient to achieve this target going forward.

8. Legal Aspects

8.1.

The Council is appointed by the Scottish Government to undertake verification duties under the Building (Scotland) Act 2003 and is responsible for the operation of the building standards system. Failure to adequately discharge such duties could trigger the Scottish Government to audit the service or amend the period that the Council is appointed as verifier.

8.2.

The establishment of the temporary post on a permanent basis will assist the Council in discharging its duties as verifier under the Building (Scotland) Act 2003.

9. Contact Officers

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10. Appendix

Appendix 1: Job Description and Person Specification - Assistant Technician (Building Standards).

1. Service	Development and Infrastructure
2. Service Area/Function	Planning, Development and Regulatory Services – Building Standards
3. Job Title	Assistant Technician (Building Standards)
4. Location	Council Offices, Kirkwall
5. Reporting To	Principal Building Standards Officer
6. Grade	G5
7. Job Evaluation Reference	A4974
8. Competency Band	A

9. Job Purpose

To provide technical support to enable the effective and efficient operation of the Building Standards function, including monitoring submissions received via the eBuilding Standards portal, administration of non-current records and updating the records management systems.

10. Job Specific Duties and Responsibilities

- Administration of all Building Standards applications submitted via the eBuilding Standards portal, to include daily monitoring of the eBuilding Standards Administration site and eBuilding Standards in-box.
- Undertaking initial quality assessment of submissions, ensuring accurate recording of information between the idox electronic document records management system and uniform building standards database fields.
- Quality check of all supporting documents, including drawings, specifications and reports and make any necessary adjustments.
- Carry out procedural check to determine if application can be validated, correspond with the applicant/agent where application considered invalid, and act as the main contact for applicants/agents during the validation process.
- Identify internal/external services required to participate in the consultation process and forward consultation request to internal consultees.
- Provide clear and effective communication to other Building Standards team members, to notify BS Administration when new applications validated, and BS case inspector/officer where additional supporting documents received.
- Undertake similar process for hard-copy paper applications with additional scanning and indexing of original documents to the electronic document records management system.
- Take an active role in future eDevelopment processes, including Mobile BS and the plan sharing initiative.
- Administration of procedures relating to non-current building standards documents, to include identification, collection, back-scanning or destruction of files and recording in the Building Standards register.

- Producing statistical information in relation to statutory performance indicators to return to the Scottish Government and other spreadsheets and statistics for external and internal analysis.
- Support the building standards team to undertake the timeous checking of documents into the IDOX Electronic Document and Records Management System (EDRMS) for the processing of building warrant applications, including indexing and redacting documents, and regular monitoring of the use of the EDRMS to ensure that sensitive or personal information is not published online and ensuring an easy interface for all users is maintained.
- Undertaking any other duties that may reasonably be required to enable the effective and efficient operation of the Building Standards function.

11. General Duties and Responsibilities

Responsibility for Employees

No line management responsibility.

Financial Resources

No financial responsibility.

Information Systems

The postholder will be required to use a range of computer packages, including Microsoft Office, IDOX E-building standards system and Uniform building standards casework system.

Working Environment

The postholder will predominately be office based.

Communication

The postholder will be required to develop and maintain positive and effective communication with other Council staff including senior management, external customers, members of the public and other key agencies which interact with the Building Standards function.

12. Corporate Responsibilities

As an employee of Orkney Islands Council the postholder is required to:-

Observe the Council's policies with regard to the data protection and confidentiality of information.

Observe the Council's Health and Safety and Risk Management policies particularly in relation to being a VDU operator.

Be aware and adhere to the Council's policy on Equal opportunities and Diversity.

Undertake any training as necessary to carry out the duties of the post.

Participate in the Employee Review and Development Scheme as appropriate.

Undertake any other work as required up to and commensurate with the grade for the post.

The post holder may be called upon to support the response required to an emergency in line with the Civil Contingencies Act 2004.

13. Criminal Records Checks - please select the relevant option(s)

- This post does not require a check on criminal conviction history
- Under the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (Exclusions and Exceptions) (Scotland) Amendment Order 2015 you are required to disclose all criminal convictions from the 'offences which must always be disclosed' list and non-spent convictions from the 'offences which are to be disclosed subject to rules' list.
- This post requires a satisfactory Basic Police Act Disclosure check.
- This post requires a satisfactory Standard Police Act Disclosure check.
- This post requires a satisfactory Enhanced Police Act Disclosure check.
- This post requires PVG Scheme membership in respect of regulated work with Children.
- This post requires PVG Scheme membership in respect of regulated work with Adults.

14. Significant/Regular demands associated with the Role

Task	Relevant (please tick) ✓	Task	Relevant (please tick) ✓
Driving (Car/Van)		Exposure to Excessive noise	
Driving (HGV/PCV)		Use of vibrating tools	
Display screen use	✓	Contact with skin irritants	
Food handling		Contact with lung irritants	
Lone working		Work involving strenuous effort	
Shift working		Working at height	
Night working		Working in static and/or awkward positions	
Working with people requiring physical assistance		Working in confined spaces	
Working with people with challenging behaviour		Sea going post	
Working with vulnerable adults		Wearing breathing apparatus	
Working with children		Working in close proximity to traffic	
Administration of prescribed medication		Other (please specify)	

15. Politically Restricted Post

Yes (where indicated only)

This post is classed as a politically restricted post under the provisions of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989.

16. Contractually Required Professional Registration

Holding, maintaining and evidencing as requested registration with the identified professional body/organisation is a contractual requirement of working in this post. The specific level of registration required to be held is specified in the Person Specification under Qualification/Attainments.

- General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS)
- Scottish Social Services Council* (SSSC)
- The Law Society of Scotland
- The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD)
- Other, please specify below:

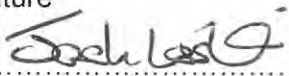

* or other relevant professional accepted by the SSSC.

17. Unsocial and Other working arrangements relevant to this post

The working pattern for this post requires that contractually you are required:

- To work on a rota that requires regular 5 day over 7 working including weekends for which you will be paid 10% Unsocial Hours Allowance;
- To work on a rota that requires regular 5 day over 7 working including weekend and nights for which you will be paid 15% Unsocial Hours Allowance;
- To work all contracted hour at weekends, for which you will be paid a 25% Unsocial Hours Allowance;
- To work all contacted hours during the night, for which you will be paid a 33% Unsocial Hours Allowance;
- To participate in a rota of Sleep In cover at your place of work, for which you can claim sleep over allowance;
- To participate in a standby duty rota, for which you can claim standby allowance.
- To work additional hours depending on the exigencies of the services.

18. Agreement of Job Description

	Signature	Date
Manager:		15 October 2018
Human Resources:		15 October 2018

19. Employee Acceptance of Job Description

Signature: Date:

PERSON SPECIFICATION

Service: Development and Infrastructure		Area: Planning, Development and Regulatory Services – Building Standards	
Post Title: Assistant Technician (Building Standards)			
Factor	Criteria	Essential or Desirable	How Assessed *
Knowledge and Experience	Working knowledge and experience of IT applications (e.g. Adobe PDF software, databases, mapping/GIS packages and MS Office).	Essential	Application form/interview
	An appreciation of rural and island communities and of the special issues facing them.	Desirable	Application form/interview
	Knowledge and experience of IDOX and Uniform.	Desirable	Application form/interview
	Knowledge of the building warrant application determination process.	Desirable	Application form/interview
	Knowledge of copyright and data protection issues.	Desirable	Application form/interview
Qualifications/ Attainments	Education to HNC or SVQ level 3 in a relevant discipline. OR Where essential qualification is not held a minimum of 2 years' experience of technical and electronic document handling issues and computer literacy.	Essential	Screening Question
Other Requirements	Ability to travel efficiently and effectively between various work locations within Orkney to meet the operational requirements of the Service.	Essential	Screening question
Core Competencies – These are the target behaviours the post holder should display (Competencies are Essential criteria and are assessed as part of the interview process)			
Being Customer/client focused	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ is respectful and courteous to customers/clients ▪ understands and resolves customer/clients' needs ▪ takes opportunities to improve customer/client services ▪ is aware of service levels expected and strives to meet them ▪ seeks and acts on feedback from customers/clients ▪ supports others when dealing with customers/clients 		
Working effectively with others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ treats others in a fair and equal manner ▪ considers and respects other peoples' ideas/opinions ▪ co-operates with others in the workplace ▪ adapts own views and ideas for the good of the team ▪ goes out of their way to help others. 		

Managing Change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ is willing to try new or different ways of working ▪ displays a flexible attitude to duties and responsibilities ▪ reprioritises own work when deadlines are changed ▪ helps others to adapt to change
Taking ownership and responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ manages own time effectively and works productively ▪ responds positively to feedback and takes appropriate action ▪ ensures own knowledge and skills are sufficient for the job ▪ considers how own behaviour affects others and changes accordingly ▪ recognises and acts when something needs to be done
Communicating effectively	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ listens carefully and asks questions if understanding is unclear ▪ uses simple and clear language ▪ seeks advice when necessary ▪ provides clear and accurate information ▪ uses appropriate body language and eye contact
Planning and decision making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ works in a planned and organised way ▪ follows instructions and procedures ▪ understands what decisions can be taken within own duties and makes them when required ▪ takes account of available resources when planning own work activities.
Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ recognises own leadership skills and abilities, and takes responsibility for using and developing these ▪ seeks feedback from others to motivate and improve own leadership. ▪ resilient and finds ways through challenging situations. ▪ identifies and works towards a shared purpose or goals ▪ values and respects the contributions of others. ▪ shares information and promotes effective knowledge management