

Agenda Item 20

Cabinet

8 January 2014

CP



Restructuring the Countryside Team (Part B)

Exempt Information

Para 3 Schedule 12A Information relating to the finance or business affairs of any particular person.

Summary

This report compliments the main report on the Countryside Team restructure which lays out the rationale and need for change in the way the team operates going forward. There are three roles which are mainly affected by the proposed changes, two are significant (the Nature Reserves Team Leader posts) and one less so the Information & Events Officer. All three posts have been through job evaluation and there are cost implications as a result albeit modest.

The requirement for a more robust Team structure being led by two Team Leader posts means implementation of not only new and exciting programmes of work (identified in the report in Part A) but also the commencement of a new strategic direction supporting the Service Manager. This is essential to the Team going forward as it will seek to position itself with new partners (Health & Wellbeing Board, Devon LNP etc) and funding streams associated with these new programme areas.

The Countryside & Leisure Manager also requires an additional level of capacity and team management at the next tier below to enable the delivery of this new agenda. The changes that have occurred within Senior Management over the last twelve to eighteen months have meant significant additional responsibilities being undertaken by all the (former) Environment Department Managers.

The restructure proposal flows from a similar decision to restructure the Environmental Health Team. Though for the Countryside Team the focus is as much on delivering a more holistic and inclusive service to the whole of the district and its communities, as well as managing its sites. The opportunities arising for the Council to engage with health and wellbeing, sustainable tourism etc that present this unique opportunity for the Countryside Team to position itself to help deliver them as a corporate priority, and adopt a stronger commercial focus around income generation and visitor numbers.

Recommendation

That Cabinet approves the restructure proposals as outlined in this report and agrees to its implementation for 1st April 2014.

a) Reasons for Recommendation

The need to put in place a new structure for the Countryside Team so that it can respond to the corporate challenges facing all discretionary services in terms of driving up income streams, delivering new programmes of work (e.g. health and wellbeing) and so building on its reputation so that it is “fit for purpose” going forward.

b) Alternative Options

To do nothing.

c) Risk Considerations

The risks are greater if “do nothing” is the only option as the Team needs to respond to the Council’s budgetary pressures over the next 5 to 10 years.

d) Policy and Budgetary Considerations

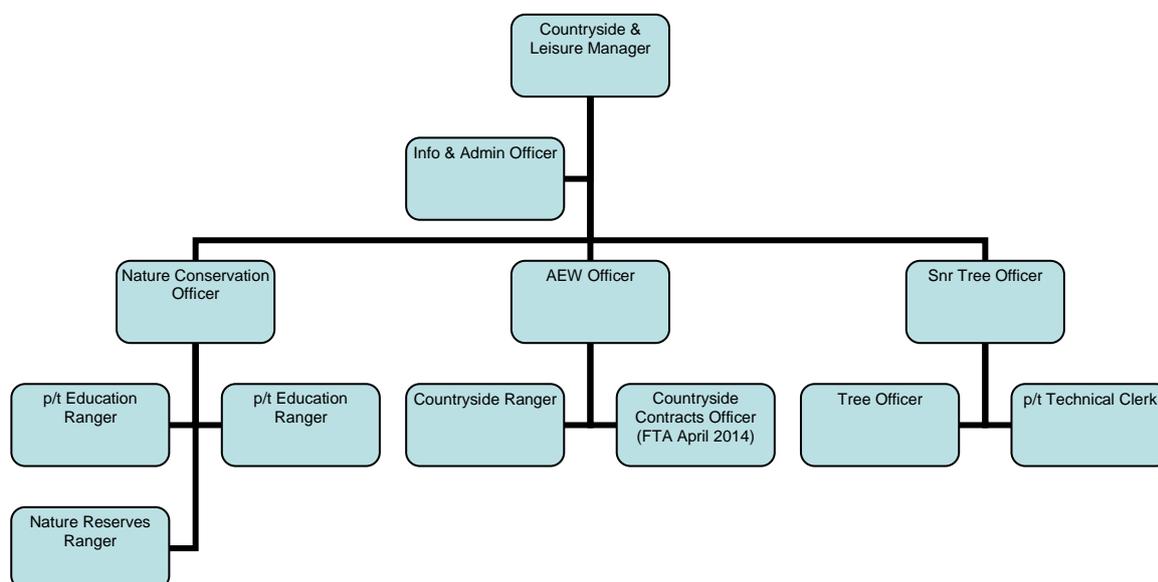
The outputs of the Team are featured strongly within the Corporate Plan’s enjoying this outstanding place theme. There may be financial implications linked to the outcomes of job evaluation which are outlined in the report.

e) Date for Review of Decision

N/A

1. Current structure

The current structure for the Countryside Team has been unaltered for the last 11 years, however as outlined in the report in Part A it is no longer “fit for purpose”. The structure is:



There are three posts which are significantly affected by the restructure proposal and have therefore been through the job evaluation process:

- Axe Wetlands Officer (Grade 7)
- Nature Conservation Officer (Grade 6)
- Information & Admin Officer (Grade 3)

All other posts have remained the same although their direct reporting lines are proposed to change with the new structure (see Appendix 1).

The current areas of responsibility for these posts are:

Axe Wetlands Officer

- Site management for Axe Wetlands (Seaton Marshes Local Nature Reserve (LNR) & Colyford Common LNR)
- People based activities on Axe Wetlands (events, volunteers etc)
- Line management of 2 staff (Contracts Officer post finishing April 2014).

Nature Conservation Officer

- Site management for Holyford Woods LNR, Trinity Hill LNR, Exmouth LNR, the Maer LNR, Fire Beacon Hill LNR, Knapp Copse LNR, Honiton Bottom Community Nature Reserve, The Knapp Community Nature Reserve, Delderfield Community Nature Reserve.
- People based activities on 9 Nature Reserves (& co-ordinating team's annual events programme)
- Line management of 3 staff

Information & Admin Officer

- All media/social media outputs for the team – press releases, CS Newsletters, website etc);
- Data collation & reporting on events on all LNRs (e.g. visitor numbers, income trends, monthly performance reporting for Cabinet etc)
- Supporting Nature Conservation Officer with annual events review/programming
- Supporting Axe Estuary Wetlands (AEW) Officer/Nature Conservation Officer with support and running of volunteer workforce;
- Office based duties – invoicing, procurement duties etc.

The issues that have arisen over the last three to four years have been the uneven distribution of additional workload responsibilities and a general confusion amongst the team. This is mainly centred around the AEW Officer and Nature Conservation Officer who share a responsibility for site management and people based activities.

The Countryside & Leisure Manager has consulted informally with all members of the Countryside Team over the last 12 months about the current team structure and understanding their views on its functionality and ability to react to new/emerging programmes of work.

The consensus coming up from those discussions has been that the current set up is now fairly dysfunctional and has caused problems in being able to progress key areas of the team's work. A cleaner and clearer structure was requested that would separate out key strategic areas of work around sites and people which would enable a better workflow movement, embedding of systems and processes, and improve communications amongst the whole team.

The inability to be proactive in new areas of work and source new funding/income streams was also cited as a significant disadvantage with the current set up meaning opportunities were being lost to evolve the team's work programmes. The overwhelming view from the team was that change was now required to ensure that the Team going forward would be in the best possible position to continue to build on all its successes of the last 11 years.

The proposed restructure will also create some capacity for the Countryside and Leisure Manager to spend more time on the leisure client role and the arts and culture agenda. Under the current structure precious little time is available to devote to these important areas of work. These are important corporate areas for the Council which require a commitment of time and forward planning with the budget uncertainties being faced over the next five to ten years.

The need to consider not only how these areas can be enjoyed by local communities but how potential future governance arrangements may need considering as decisions are made about supporting discretionary services. The Countryside and Leisure Manager will need to tie in the work of the Countryside Team into all of these discussions.

2. Costs of restructuring

Following through with the outcomes of a wider staff engagement over the last twelve months and considering the views from Senior Management the proposed restructure has been put together (see Appendix 1). Advice has come from the Corporate Manager - Organisational Development and the restructure proposal considered and approved by SMT.

The JE process has identified the 2 Team Leader posts at the same grade (Grade 7) which would mean an upgrade of the current Nature Conservation Officer post (currently Grade 6). Also the upgrading of the Information & Events Officer post from Grade 3 to Grade 4.

- This would mean an additional £2,144 p.a for one Team Leader post.
- Also an additional £923 p.a for the Information & Events post.

The additional costs could therefore be £3K per annum but it is expected that the focus on driving up income and exploring new opportunities for partnership working will bring additional income into the team over time so covering these additional salary costs. It is proposed that funding for a permanent Ranger Apprentice will be a funding bid to an external fund to be matched funded from within the existing LNR budget, and the scheme will meet our commitment to pay a living wage.

Through the process of implementing these changes we could find that there is a potential redundancy scenario. The financial scenario for any redundancy payments would be circa £20-23K. In anticipation of this scenario the cost of this would be met from the existing Nature Reserves budget which would not therefore draw upon any additional funds from this year's budget.

I am confident that the changes proposed to the staffing structure will enable the team to build on the quality Countryside offer, increase visitors numbers and income generation, and create some additional capacity to develop services such as managing the Cranbrook Country Park. The restructure will also help in aligning the Countryside offer with the health and wellbeing agenda; green infrastructure work and ensure that residents and visitors enjoy the East Devon countryside as an outstanding place.

Legal Implications

As indicated in the report the proposed restructuring arrangements are to be carried out in line with legal requirements. Section 145 of the Local Government Act 1972 permits charging for the use of recreational facilities and for them to be hired out.

Financial Implications

The financial implications have been stated in the report. The additional costs of regrading 2 posts are minimal however the risk of one postholder opting for redundancy would incur a significant one off cost plus recruitment costs.

Consultation on Reports to the Executive

N/A

Background Papers

- Proposed new staff chart

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Cabinet
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