REPORT OF THE STRATEGIC DIRECTOR
TO THE EXECUTIVE
7 OCTOBER 2005

Request for new post of Database Co-ordinator

1.0   **Introduction and Report Summary**

1.1   The Uniform system is the primary computer system and database for several services - Environmental Health, Planning, Building Control, Housing, Legal, Land Charges, Estates and Asset Management.

1.2   There are currently two 'gaps' in the support needed to maintain and develop the Uniform system. Firstly, in the Environmental Health service area there is no modular system administrator to provide expert advice on system development, report-writing, data retrieval, query resolution, best practice research and user group representation. Secondly there is no corporate resource across all the service areas to provide cross service area co-ordination, resolve system-wide problems and manage system-wide upgrades.

1.3   The first of these resource 'gaps' was recognised in the Council Budget when a Contingency sum was earmarked for support in one of the service areas. A recent corporate review has confirmed the continuing need for this additional resource as well as the corporate resource. This report sets out the business case for creating a new post of Database Co-ordinator.

1.4   The Contact Officer for this report is Steve Bishop, Strategic Director (01235 540332).

2.0   *Recommendations*

     (a) To create a new post of 'Database Co-ordinator';

     (b) To release the earmarked contingency to part-fund the cost of the new post; and,

     (c) To approve a recurring supplementary estimate to be met from Contingency to cover the remaining cost of the post.

     (d) Subject to the above recommendations being agreed, that the adequacy of the new arrangements in meeting the needs set out in this report be assessed and subsequently reported to the Executive.

3.0   **Relationship with the Council's Vision, Strategies and Policies**

     (a)   Vision Statement objectives A and B.

     (b)   The report does not contravene any Council policy or strategy.

4.0   **Background and Supporting Information**

4.1   The Uniform system is the primary computer system and database for several services - Environmental Health, Planning, Building Control, Housing, Legal, Land Charges, Estates and Asset Management.

4.2 The ICT Operations team provides technical support to all the service areas and all but one of the service areas also possesses 'system supervisor' resource. However, Environmental Health does not have a system supervisor, preventing it from fully utilising the Environmental Health Uniform module and sub modules which has led to problems in retrieving management data and managing performance. Also, there is no broader co-ordination resource to share best practice across the various modules, manage upgrades and solve systemic problems.

4.3 Without additional system administration resource (an 'expert user'), the service areas will experience difficulties in keeping pace with software changes and making optimum use of the system.

4.4 Assistant Directors first raised this over a year ago. Members recognised the particular problem experienced in Environmental Health by earmarking a sum in Contingency to resolve it. More recently the Scrutiny Committee expressed concern about this when examining the Waste contract and noted the Council's inability to extract contract monitoring data from the system.

5.0 **Business Case for a new post**

5.1 After the Directors revisited the problem earlier this year, the Assistant Director (Audit) undertook an objective assessment of the situation. This exercise identified that the service areas have a definite need for additional resource to link up the services and provide a common and consistent approach to Uniform development. Also, without the expertise to generate the necessary management information reports, Environmental Health is suffering from inadequate performance management and contract monitoring capability.

5.2 Although the exact resource requirement across the four service areas has not been quantified, the Assistant Director (Audit) confirmed it is at least 1 full time equivalent post.

5.3 It is suggested that an initial post be created in Environmental Health to provide immediate support to address the most pressing need. The post will also be made available to the other Uniform-using service areas whilst the Assistant Directors assess whether the resource is sufficient. The impact of the new post will be reviewed in a year's time to ensure that this investment is cost-effective. If it is not considered to be adequate any additional resource need will have to be demonstrated.

5.4 The existing Uniform system supervisors do not have any extra capacity. The designated system supervisor post in Legal provides a useful template for the new one, although the new post will undertake more complex query resolution, system development and corporate co-ordination. It is therefore likely that the new post would be Grade 5 – 6 (subject to job evaluation), total cost £25 - 35k including oncosts. The new post's job description will clearly differentiate between the service-specific Environmental Health Service Area support duties and the corporate duties, in support of all service areas.

5.5 Part of the cost (£15k per annum) would be met from earmarked Contingency. The remaining net cost after utilising the earmarked Contingency would be £10 - 20k per annum. It is hoped that this cost could be met from savings likely to result from the reorganisation of several vacant posts. However, this cannot be assured at present and the net cost would initially need to be funded from a supplementary estimate.

6.0 **Options**

6.1 Members may choose not to create this extra resource, thereby freeing up the earmarked contingency sum and not incurring the increased employee costs. This would maintain the status quo position. Officers strongly advise Members that this option represents a significant

risk of service failure and is not sustainable. The performance management and contract enforcement problems in Environmental Health would continue to escalate and corporate Uniform maintenance and development would be impeded.

6.2   Alternatively, Members may wish to consider the creation of more than one support post. The Assistant Director (Audit) concluded that, ideally, each of the four service areas would possess its own support officer (although not necessarily full-time posts) to specialise in the system aspects relevant to their own service area's module. This would increase the costs. As the exact resource has not yet been quantified this could actually lead to over-staffing.

6.3   Officers suggest that neither of these options should be pursued. Instead, a single full-time post should be created initially, which will address the immediate service needs and will help to quantify the exact resource requirement.

STEVE BISHOP
STRATEGIC DIRECTOR

Background Papers: Report of the Assistant Director (Audit)