

Agenda Item No:

Report To: Cabinet

Date of Meeting: 29 September 2022

Report Title: Graduate Planner Programme

Report Author: Simon Cole, Assistant Director of Planning & Development

Job Title:

Portfolio Holder: Cllr. Neil Bell

Portfolio Holder for: Planning & Development



Summary:

In recent years, the Planning & Development service has run a graduate planner programme, which recruits graduates to work within the service on a 2 – 3 year fixed term contract.

During their contract, the graduate planners experience working within the Planning Applications, Strategic Sites and Spatial Planning teams, whilst studying towards their Chartered Town Planners Masters.

This report sets out the details of the graduate planner programme and some of its recent successes.

Key Decision: NO

Significantly Affected Wards: None

Recommendations: **The Cabinet is recommended to:-**

- I. Note the contents of the report and success of the graduate planner programme.**

Policy Overview: None.

Financial Implications: None. The graduate planner positions are funded through the Planning & Development service budget. Any Masters apprenticeship training for planning graduates is funded through the Apprenticeship Levy.

Legal Implications: Not applicable.

Equalities Impact Assessment: Not required as no policy changes proposed.

Data Protection Impact Assessment: None.

Risk Assessment (Risk Appetite) Not applicable.

Statement):

Sustainability Implications: Not applicable.

Other Material Implications: None

Exempt from Publication: **NO**

Background Papers: **None**

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Introduction and Background

1. This report is to inform the Cabinet about the Graduate Planner programme that has been successfully running for a number of years within the Council's Planning & Development service.
2. In recent years, the Planning service has recruited a number of planning graduates, which are employed to work within the service on a 2 – 3 year fixed term contract.
3. As part of their contract, the graduate planners have experience working in the Strategic Sites, Spatial Planning (planning policy work), and the Planning Application (Development Management) teams.
4. Typically each graduate would normally spend around 8 - 12 months in each of the areas, to get an understanding of the type of work within each team and build up the relevant skills. During these timeframes, the graduates gain the relevant experience to assist in producing useful outputs for the teams and department as a whole.
5. Work within each of the teams includes:
 - Handling their own case load of planning applications
 - Validating planning applications
 - Working on strategic planning matters, such as larger projects, like the South of Ashford Garden Community, and
 - Working on preparing planning policy documents and guidance.

Benefits of graduates

Grow your own planner approach

6. The graduate scheme has enabled the Council to work towards a 'grow our own planners' approach, by identifying and recruiting staff at the start of their careers and supporting their professional development within a supportive and professionally interesting environment.
7. Officers' experience over recent graduate recruitment has strongly indicated that this has proven to be a successful way of identifying talented individuals, at the start of their careers, to contribute significantly to the Planning Service in both the short term and the long term. Recruitment exercises have been successful with good quality fields of candidates to choose from and, in the main, the appointed graduates have worked well and contributed to the output of the service whilst expanding their own professional experience.

Resourcing

8. Recruitment in the planning industry has been particularly challenging in recent times. Coupled with a significant turnover of staff in the Planning service in last couple of years, this has led to a greater reliance on external consultants to support the provision of day to day services.
9. The graduate planner programme can help to reduce this reliance on external consultants, by providing resource to assist with the work of the Planning service.
10. The fluid and flexible nature of the graduate programme, also means that graduates can easily transition between the teams to help address the resource pressures. This ensures a continuing, good quality range of experiences and opportunities whilst working within the planning service at the Council.

Masters Apprenticeship

11. Where required, the Council also sponsors the graduates through a part-time Masters Apprenticeship in Town and Country Planning. This apprenticeship is accredited with the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) and helps the graduates on the pathway towards becoming a Chartered Planner.
12. To work towards this apprenticeship, the graduates have day release to study one day a week, during the 2 year Masters course, at London South Bank University.
13. Giving the graduates the opportunity to study for a Masters, provides them with the technical knowledge and understanding of the planning system, whilst also giving them the real-life experience of applying it to the work that the Council does as Local Planning Authority.

Previous graduates

14. A number of previous planning graduates have secured permanent posts in the Planning & Development service, following their graduate programmes and have offered excellent service during their time here. This includes several Planning Officers within the Strategic Sites teams, and a Deputy Team Leader in the Spatial Planning Team.
15. The success and career growth of these former graduate planners provides clear evidence that engaging bright and committed graduate officers at the start of their planning careers, can provide the Council with a source of highly capable officers, who might otherwise be extremely difficult to find in a crowded and limited market.

Current and future graduates

16. Following a successful recent recruitment process, two new graduate planners were recruited in the graduate programme in summer 2022. The new graduates have started their programme within the Planning Applications

team, working on validating planning applications, before progressing to manage their own caseload of planning applications.

17. It is expected that the graduate planner programme will become an annual recruitment exercise, as either existing graduate contracts end or graduates have either been promoted internally or moved on to employment elsewhere.
18. Opportunities to expand and enhance the graduate experience are also being considered including partnering with a local private planning consultancy to enable the potential to give public and private sector graduate planners the chance to experience the 'other side' of the industry so that the particular challenges of each can be better appreciated.

Next Steps in Process

19. Members are asked to note the contents of the report and the recent successes of the graduate planner programme.

Conclusion

20. A graduate planner programme has been successfully running within the Council's Planning & Development service for a number of years.
21. The graduate programme has given the Council the ability to work towards a 'grow our own planners' approach, by recruiting individuals into the Council at the start of their careers in planning. It also provides the graduates with 'on the job' training and experience working within the different teams in the Council's Planning service.
22. Since the inception of the graduate planner programme, a number of previous graduates have then gone on to secure permanent posts within the Planning & Development service. Experiences from this graduate programme has clearly shown the importance of the programme by providing the Council with highly capable officers from the start of their careers.

Portfolio Holder's Views

23. I fully support and endorse the graduate planner programme. The graduate programme offers the Council the perfect opportunity to establish a 'grow your own planner approach', to give the graduates the chance to experience the work that the Council does and provide a meaningful contribution to the work of the Planning service, within a supportive, interesting and varied work environment.

Contact and Email

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