

Recruitment

Officers' Recommendation

1. That Members agree not to replace the Enforcement Officer position.
2. That Members agree not to replace the part-time (18.5hrs) Environment Officer position.
3. That Members agree to recruit a part-time (22.5hrs) Environment Officer to cover maternity leave.

Background

In April 2023, one of the part-time (22.5hrs a week) Environment Officers informed the Chief Officer that they would be taking maternity leave later in the year. The Chief Officer took the decision to stand the officer down from undertaking surveys at sea on local fishing vessels.

The Environment team has a plan to undertake a range of surveys at sea onboard potting vessels to looking at different aspects of the crab and lobster fisheries. To support the delivery of this programme of surveys, the Marine Development Officer has agreed to carry out the survey work that had been assigned to the part-time Environment Officer. The part-time Environment Officer will deliver the marine licence aspects of the Marine Development Officer's role. The Environment Officer used to undertake the marine licencing role prior to the employment of the Marine Development Officer. Maintaining the marine licencing role is important to meet one of Defra's delivery expectations from the SR21 allocation of funding to IFCA's.

In May 2023, the Chief Officer received notices of resignation from two Officers. The first resignation was received from the other part-time (18.5hrs a week) Environment Officer. In their resignation letter the Officer set out that they had wished to stay with D&S IFCA but had been approached by a previous employer and offered a full-time, temporary position to deliver a specific project. The Officer's decision was influenced by the prospect of developing their skills and receiving a higher, pro-rata, salary.

The second resignation was received from one of the Enforcement Team. The Officer expressed considerable regret in having to leave D&S IFCA and by doing so ending their 18-year career in fisheries enforcement. The Officer's decision was based on being offered a higher starting salary (the equivalent to being placed on the next higher NJPC salary banding adopted by D&S IFCA).

Future recruitment

As noted in the Job Evaluation paper, D&S IFCA continues to face a funding crisis and it is forecasting a deficit between income and operational budget requirements of £152,000 (~20% higher than the base levy) in the next financial year – 2024/25. This deficit is based on salary negotiations being limited to 5% (3% with a 2% contingency) and general inflation being much lower than current levels.

Local Authorities have never increased D&S IFCA's levy by more than 3.5% and Defra has confirmed that it will not intervene meaningfully to address the underlying funding structure failings of D&S IFCA this financial year and without further direct financial support from Defra,

the gap in available funding will not close sufficiently to prevent significant use of General Reserves.

The Chief Officer believes that to reduce D&S IFCA's operational costs there is no alternative to reducing the number of officers. The Chief Officer recognises that less staff will reduce the Authority's ability to meet its Statutory duties but must have regard to their obligation to ensure that D&S IFCA functions within its financial limitations and to mitigate the risk that the organisation reaches the minimum level of General Reserves to stay operational.

The alternative approach for D&S IFCA is to maintain current employment levels and accept increases in operational costs in the hope that when the minimum level of General Reserves is met, possibly within two years, the Local Authorities and Defra step in to provide the necessary financial support.

The risk with the latter approach is that without that support, D&S IFCA will need to make a number of Officers redundant in one go and that will have a far greater impact on the organisation and Officers than reducing the number of employees now by not replacing Officers that voluntarily resign from their positions.

Considerations

The Chief Officer recommends that D&S IFCA does not recruit a replacement Enforcement Officer. The remaining team of five full-time Enforcement Officers are now all warranted and two Officers have the necessary qualifications to helm the Authority's vessels with another Officer soon to qualify. The team will be restricted in their ability to undertake shore and sea patrols as a result but will continue to use an intelligence led approach to prioritise this work. In FTE terms the loss of one full-time officer represents a reduction of 16.67% of the available weekly hours in the team.

Not replacing the experienced Officer (at top of current salary banding) will result in a saving (including salary and on costs and training / PPE requirements of approximately £45,000 per year. (pro rata in 2023/24 of approximately £33,750)

To continue to deliver the necessary evidence to inform the Authority's management decisions, and to undertake the necessary assessments of fishing activities within Marine Protected Areas, the Environment team needs to remain at an FTE strength of at least three officers. However, in the present financial climate it is not possible to maintain this. In FTE terms the loss of the part-time Environment Officer represents a reduction of 16.1% of the available weekly hours in the team.

The impact of losing one of the part-time officers (18.5hrs a week) will be challenging but the remaining team with the support of the Marine Development Officer and the Deputy Chief Officer will look to support the Environment Team's workload for the rest of 2023/24. Additional crab and lobster survey capability will be provided through a Research Assistant hosted by D&S IFCA and funded by the Fisheries Industry Science Partnership funding this year.

By not replacing the part-time Environment Officer would deliver annual savings (including salary and on costs and training / PPE requirements of approximately £25,000 per year).

The Chief Officer recommends that the Authority does cover the maternity period of the part-time Environment Officer by recruiting a short-term replacement on a 22.5 hours a week contract. This would result in an increase in staff costs of approximately £16,500 during the expected period of maternity leave.

The recommendations would result in overall savings of approximately £53,500 in 2024/25.

Background Papers

- Agenda Item 12 June 2021 - Organisational Weakness & Staffing Issues

(All are available within Section B of the [D&S IFCA Website Resource Library](#))