



Belfast City Council

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| Report to: | Health and Environmental Services Committee |
| Subject: | Review of Scientific Unit Staffing Requirements |
| Date: | 5th November 2008 |
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Relevant Background Information

The purpose of this review was to ascertain the appropriate staffing requirements within the Scientific Unit as well as to re-examine the roles and responsibilities and grading of the posts.

The Business Improvement Section (BIS) carried out the review following approval at the June Health and Environmental Services Committee and by the Council's Vetting Panel on 26 June 2008.

BIS has taken into consideration the increased workload on the Unit resulting from the development of the North Foreshore, closure of Dargan Road Landfill Site, increased monitoring at the Duncrue Industrial Estate and the impact of new licence conditions imposed on the Council.

These factors have impacted on the volume and complexity of work for the Scientific Unit and recommendations from this review are made to ensure that the Council has the capacity to achieve compliance with environmental legislative obligations.

Key Issues

1. CONTEXT

Given the increased workload and legal requirements mentioned above, this review of the Scientific Unit was carried out to ensure that it has the appropriate levels of staff to provide professional services in-house. Moreover, it should ensure that Belfast City Council can meet new licensing legislation and regulations at the Dargan Road Landfill Site, North Foreshore and Duncrue Industrial Estate.

Within the context of the Corporate Plan, 2008 – 2011, the Council is committed to taking better care of Belfast's environment to provide a cleaner, greener, healthier city

now and for the future. The environmental monitoring undertaken at these locations plays a key role in the delivery of this promise. The council is also currently involved in the construction of an electricity generating plant on the North Foreshore that will be fuelled by landfill gas. This highlights the Council's commitment to act sustainably through the effective and efficient use of resources.

Failure to meet the conditions of the Landfill Waste Management Licence and other regulatory requirements could result in enforcement action being taken against the Council, including the possibility of large fines being imposed and a notice of closure being placed on the landfill site and North Foreshore prohibiting any further development until remedial actions are introduced.

2. OPERATIONAL

The Scientific Unit carries out monitoring, analysis and gas system control work at the North Foreshore for the following purposes:

- To ensure that the Council leased property in Duncrue Industrial Estate is protected from dangerous levels of landfill gas;
- To monitor the emissions and discharges from the now closed landfill site as required by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA).
- To manage the gas control plant and flaring process and future electricity generation plant (to be operational by April 2009).

This work and any increases in workload are explained in more detail below.

Monitoring at the Duncrue Industrial Estate

The Duncrue Industrial Estate is of significant importance to the Council as lettings from the 100 plus units generate in excess of £1 million per annum. The Scientific Unit staff monitor the gas control system and the inside of industrial units for gas, encompassing approximately 60 gas wells and 100 plus industrial units. This work is carried out by the Scientific Officer with assistance from the Technical Assistant.

A new gas control system is being installed. However, although it is predicted that there will be additional workload on staff managing the new gas control system at Duncrue Industrial Estate, it is not anticipated that the increased workload would on its own justify the creation of additional staff.

Monitoring at the Dargan Road Landfill Site and North Foreshore

a. Landfill gas monitoring. Now that the landfill site is closed (March 2007) and is being capped and reinstated, the NIEA is imposing new licence conditions on the Council. The number of gas wells to be monitored has increased from 110 to 223 and the frequency of monitoring has increased from a quarterly to a monthly basis. An additional 12 gas control wells have also been installed at the new Waste Transfer Station. This significantly increases the monitoring workload.

In addition, the new site licence now also requires the Council to report gas levels and any breach of trigger levels within 42 days of the monitoring period to the NIEA. This represents a large increase in the data handling and reporting workload on the Scientific Unit's staff.

b. Leachate and ground water monitoring. The newly imposed licence conditions require an increase in the number of locations where leachate and ground water are monitored from 45 to 64. Water quality samples must now be taken quarterly at these 64 locations. Water quality must be monitored at all surface water and marine water locations on a monthly basis. Up to 259 parameters will be monitored at water monitoring locations on a quarterly basis, 10 parameters must be monitored monthly. This will result in a large increase in the amount of data handled by the Scientific Unit staff.

c. Electricity Generation. The Council is currently constructing an electricity generation plant at the North Foreshore that will be fuelled by gas from the gas field. The introduction of this electricity generation plant will require staff to manage the flow of gas to the plant and this will require greater levels of onsite balancing and adjusting of the gas flow than was required for the flaring of gas.

Additional areas of work undertaken by the Scientific Unit

In addition to the aforementioned increases in monitoring and sampling, the Scientific Unit is also involved in new monitoring regimes. These include: recording of rainfall data at the landfill; monitoring capping materials for contamination; monitoring of gas at the Waste Transfer Station; and monitoring water quality at 'discharge consent' locations.

The scientific staff are also considered as a resource across the Environmental Health Service and the Scientific Officer provides monitoring services to the housing, health and safety and food safety sections. Staff also provide advice to other Council Services on issues relating to legionnaires disease and swimming pool safety.

3. STRUCTURAL

The Scientific Unit is currently made up of a Unit Manager, 1 Scientific Officer, 1 Scientific Officer (Landfill), 1 Monitoring Assistant and 1 Technical Assistant (see Appendix I).

Having considered the levels of increased workload and operational responsibility on the Scientific Unit as previously detailed, BIS is recommending that **an additional Scientific Officer (Landfill) post is created** and that the revised structure for the Scientific Unit as outlined in Appendix II is adopted.

This additional resource will help to ensure that the Scientific Unit is best placed to fulfil the conditions and regulatory requirements of the Waste Management Licence relating to the North Foreshore.

Enhanced Roles and Responsibilities

There is also a need for the appropriate configuration of roles and responsibilities within the Scientific Unit and the structure to ensure that the increased workload can be accommodated effectively, as detailed below.

Scientific Officer (Landfill) existing. In addition to the monitoring workload on this post increasing significantly, this post has also received additional responsibilities. BIS recommends therefore that the post is re-graded from Salary Scale SO1 to Salary Scale SO2 and that the revised job description for the Scientific Officer (Landfill) is adopted.

Monitoring Assistant. The role of this post has also grown considerably, having greater responsibility for monitoring and collection of samples. BIS recommends that the post is re-graded from Salary Scale 4 to Salary Scale 5, and that the revised job description for the post is adopted.

Scientific Officer. This post has also received additional responsibilities and following an assessment of these, BIS recommends that the post is re-graded from Salary Scale SO1 to Salary Scale SO2 and that the revised job description for the Scientific Officer is adopted.

BIS Recommendations

There are significant implications for the Council if the above issues are not addressed as soon as possible.

Business Improvement Section (BIS) has developed the recommendations outlined below to address the key issues identified. These recommendations are based on objective analysis of the information gathered.

- An additional post of Scientific Officer (Landfill) is created.
- The post of Scientific Officer (Landfill) is re-graded from salary scale SO1 to SO2.
- The revised job description for Scientific Officer (Landfill) is adopted.
- The post of Monitoring Assistant is re-graded from salary scale 4 to scale 5.
- The revised job description for Monitoring Assistant is adopted.
- The post of Scientific Officer is re-graded from salary scale SO1 to SO2.
- The revised job description for Scientific Officer is adopted.
- The revised structure for Scientific Unit is adopted
- That BIS evaluate the effectiveness of the recommendations made in this report after an appropriate timescale

The additional costs of the BIS recommendations amounts to £35,309 with £32,978 of these costs relates to monitoring of the landfill site and £2331 relates to the monitoring of Duncrue Industrial Estate.

Resource Implications

Financial

The monitoring costs for the Landfill Site, including the £32,978 of costs relating to the additional Scientific Officer (Landfill) post and the re-grading of the Monitoring Officer have been included in the Closure Plan estimates prepared by Waste Management and will be met from the Council's Dargan Road Landfill Closure Fund.

Additional costs of £2331 associated with the re-grading of the Scientific Officer post carrying out monitoring duties at Duncrue Industrial Estate will be met from an increase to the monetary value of the service level agreement with the Asset Management Unit.

Furthermore, electricity generation from the North Foreshore will yield a profit of £28.7 million (£1.44 million p.a.) for Belfast City Council over a 20 year period¹. Also lettings in the Duncrue Industrial Estate generate in excess of £1 million per annum.

¹ Deloitte report, Landfill Gas Electricity Generation Options Assessment, Dec 2007

Human Resource

It is anticipated that the recommendations will result in no contractual changes and there will be no HR issues to be considered.

The implementation of these recommendations will be managed in line with existing BCC policies and processes.

Recommendation

The Committee is asked to agree the BIS recommendations for the Scientific Unit as a management side position.

Members are asked that, if no written objections are received, the Service can proceed directly to implementation stage without further referral back to Committee.

Key to Abbreviations

BIS – Business Improvement Section

HR – Human Resources Section

BCC – Belfast City Council

NIEA – Northern Ireland Environment Agency

Documents Attached

Appendix I – Current Scientific Unit Structure

Appendix II – Proposed Scientific Unit Structure

Appendix III – BIS Report

