



# Doncaster Council

## EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONS DECISION RECORD

The following decision was taken on Wednesday, 2nd March, 2022 by Cabinet.

**Date notified to all Members: Thursday, 3rd March 2022.**

**End of the call-in period is 5.00 p.m. on Monday, 14th March 2022. This decision will not be implemented until after this date and time.**

Present:

Chair - Mayor Ros Jones (Mayor of Doncaster with responsibility for Budget and Policy)  
Vice-Chair - Councillor Glyn Jones (Deputy Mayor, Portfolio Holder for Housing and Business.)

	<b>Cabinet Member for:</b>
Councillor Lani-Mae Ball	Portfolio Holder for Education, Skills and Young People
Councillor Nigel Ball	Portfolio Holder for Public Health, Leisure, Culture and Planning
Councillor Joe Blackham	Portfolio Holder for Highways, Infrastructure and Enforcement
Councillor Rachael Blake	Portfolio Holder for Children's Social Care, Communities and Equalities
Councillor Phil Cole	Portfolio Holder for Finance and Trading Services
Councillor Mark Houlbrook	Portfolio Holder for Sustainability and Waste
Councillor Jane Nightingale	Portfolio Holder for Corporate Resources
Councillor Andrea Robinson	Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care

## PUBLIC MEETING – SCHEDULE OF DECISIONS

### Public Questions and Statements

There were no public questions or statements submitted at the meeting.

The Decision Record forms dated 16th February, 2022 (previously circulated), were noted.

## DECISION 1

### **1. AGENDA ITEM NUMBER AND TITLE**

Department of Levelling Up Housing and Communities (DLUHC) Grant for RIPA (Reducing Invalid Planning Applications) & BOPS (Back-Office Planning System)

Digital Project.

## **2. DECISION TAKEN**

Cabinet:-

- (1) approved the acceptance of the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) project and funds of £358,000.00 in order for Doncaster Council to partake in Phase 2 of the RIPA/BOPS project which will be focussing on improving the software used by Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) actively responding to Government's white paper 'Planning for the Future';
- (2) approved the expenditure incurred, or to be incurred by the project team;
- (3) gave approval to delegate to the Director of Economy and Environment (or in his absence the Assistant Director of Economy and Development), in consultation with the Director of Corporate Resources (or in her absence the Assistant Director of Finance), and the Assistant Director of Legal and Democratic Services to agree any further terms and conditions and to engage in discussions with DLUHC in regards to any necessary changes to the spend of allocated funds to ensure successful delivery of the project; and
- (4) agreed that the Portfolio Holder for Public Health, Leisure, Culture and Planning be updated throughout the process, in order to ensure that the project brings about a step change for the residents and businesses of Doncaster.

## **3. REASON FOR DECISION**

Cabinet considered a report introduced by Councillor Nigel Ball, Cabinet Member for Public Health, Leisure, Culture and Planning, which sought approval to accept the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) project, and funds of £358,000, in order for Doncaster Council to partake in Phase 2 of the RIPA (Reducing Invalid Planning Applications) and BOPS (Back-Office Planning System) national Digital Project.

The DLUHC had launched an exciting opportunity for Local Planning Authorities to work with Government and other authorities in a digital innovation project to design and implement modern planning software developed by authorities for authorities with citizens needs at the forefront

Councillor Ball outlined that the project was to further develop new digital products, with the focus on improving the software used by Local Planning Authorities, by increasing the efficiency across the planning application process whilst actively responding to the Government's White Paper 'Planning for the Future', which had proposed a number of fundamental changes for the future of the planning process.

He highlighted that Phase 2 of the project focussed on household extensions, which were the Local Authority's largest volume applications, and also had a high validity rate. The applicants for householder developments were often one time only customers who understandably found the planning process complicated, which in turn resulted in customer frustrations and delays, as well as a lot of officer time assisting customers in navigating the service. It was hoped that the funding would enable a more streamlined and positive experience for Doncaster residents when submitting planning applications.

Councillor Ball emphasised that the Council recognised that the application process was at fault and not Doncaster residents, who have, at times, had to navigate a sometimes confusing myriad of technical planning jargon, which was not user friendly, clear or coherent. He explained that the project aimed to tackle such issues by simplifying the planning submission service, utilising the Council's data and web platforms to design and build modern planning services that work better for everyone. The project encapsulates the core values of Doncaster Council by allowing the Council to be more connected and creative, utilising this opportunity to develop innovative planning application systems that are more efficient, accessible and transparent, whilst at the same time, allowing the preparation and submission of a planning application for our residents to be as user-friendly as possible.

The report sought approval to accept the funding and progress with the recruitment to the project team to ensure the delivery mechanisms were established for the proposed project delivery start date of 1st April 2022. Paragraph 17 of the report provided further details of the staffing implications required to deliver the project.

Councillor Mark Houlbrook, in welcoming the pilot, commented that the funding would aid local residents in the planning application process, and hoped that this would also help to bring improvements to businesses and organisations in Doncaster. He hoped that this would be positive for Doncaster people and the local economy. In highlighting the improvements expected from the funding, Councillor Houlbrook spoke of the need to ensure all applicants were effectively assisted in using the new process.

#### **4. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED AND REJECTED**

Option 1 - 'Do Nothing and decline the funding and opportunity to work alongside DLUHC and other pioneering Authorities'.

If Doncaster does not proceed with the RIPA/BOPS project, the status quo will be retained. However, the Council would lose an important opportunity to work directly with Government to help shape the digital planning reforms. The Council would also continue to have frustrations with the quality and number of householder planning applications, which, if not completed correctly, could cause frustration and have resource implications for both officers and its customers as they are made invalid and thus remain an inefficient 'burden' in terms of officers having to request information requirements for the bulk of applications that the Council deal with, in order to eventually make the application valid. Customer frustrations also develop in this exchange.

**5. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS**

There were no declarations.

**6. IF EXEMPT, REASON FOR EXEMPTION**

Not Exempt.

**7. DIRECTOR RESPONSIBLE FOR IMPLEMENTATION**

Director of Economy and Environment.

Signed.....Chair/Decision Maker