

To: GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE		Subject: STAFFING
From: HEAD OF LEGAL SERVICES		
Date: 29 JULY 1996	Ref: WBK/CK	

1. **Summary**

This Report details the problems which have arisen recently in coping with workload, particularly in Council House Sales. The recommendations propose both short and long term solutions.

2.1 **Workload Distribution and Volumes**

In the initial establishment Report prior to 1 April, it was stated that the workload would be difficult to predict but an assumption was made that the merging authorities had employed sufficient legal staff to cope with their workload and that the staff had been allocated duties commensurate with the volume of work created in each activity.

2.2 The current distribution of legal staff is as follows:

Licensing	1 Principal 1 Senior	
District Courts	1 Principal 3 Solicitors	
Litigation and Advice	1 Principal 2 Seniors (1 vacant) 2 Solicitors	
Contracts	1 Principal 1 Solicitor	
Conveyancing	2 Principals 2 Seniors 6 Solicitors	(1 on maternity leave until January 1997) (1 on suspension pending disciplinary hearing) (2 on long-term sick leave)

2.3 Within most other sections, other Solicitors undertake conveyancing work to a greater or lesser degree.

Nevertheless the experienced conveyancers are under particular pressure since 40% of the section is unavailable for a variety of reasons. The main area of priority work involves Council House Sales.

Receipts provide most of the money for the Housing Capital Programme. This year approximately £21.5m is estimated. Results for the first quarter reveal that the sales required to meet that target are potentially there, but £2.7m has been collected as against a quarterly target of £5.4m. The transition to unitary status has had an obvious effect. Probably as much as four weeks has been lost in many conveyancing transactions.

2.4 **Short Term Solutions**

Clearly the Department has under achieved though this disguises the outstanding efforts of each individual who have taken on an over-burdening workload. In short, the staff are not coping. Short term solutions are listed below some of whom require Committee approval.

- 2.4.1 Distribution of Council House Sales work to all available staff with other non-urgent work restricted for a short period.
- 2.4.2 Temporary staff taken on to cover the long term absences. The most recent budget variance report indicates that this can be met from existing resources. The budget for employee costs to the end of June is £231,754, against an actual spend of £176,940 which shows an underspend of £54,814. It would be particularly helpful to utilise Solicitors with local authority experience. At least one Solicitor has informally approached the Council. He took early retirement from Strathclyde Regional Council but would be prepared to undertake conveyancing on a temporary basis. He accepts that a temporary contract would require to take into account his superannuation etc situation. One of our Solicitors on long term sickness leave has never in fact worked for North Lanarkshire Council and reaches full retirement age on 21 September 1996. It would be intended to replace this post.
- 2.4.3 The vacant Litigation Senior post is in the process of being filled. The successful applicant will be expected to undertake some conveyancing work commensurate with the other priority duties assigned.

2.5.1 Longer Term Solutions

An analysis of total work volume together with an assessment of service delivery efficiency will be undertaken to verify whether permanent changes need to be made in the budgeted establishment. Solutions will be addressed as part of the Service Plan process and will be reported to the Committee in due course.

2.5.2 Summary of Proposals

- i) Re-allocation of work in very short term to address back-log.
- ii) Temporary staff taken on within existing budget.
- iii) Expedite filling of vacant posts.
- iv) Address long term trend through the Service Plan process.

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