

## PROTECT - STAFF



Department of the  
**Environment**  
www.doeni.gov.uk

**HR & Organisational Change Division**

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Your reference:

Our reference:

Date: 3 August 2010

Mr David McCammick  
Chair  
SOLACE  
c/o Antrim Borough Council  
50 Stiles Way  
Antrim  
BT41 2UB

Dear David

**Secondment Opportunities – Specialist Planners**

You are probably aware that the Department of the Environment is experiencing unprecedented financial pressure this year and has had to draw up plans to achieve a rapid reduction in its operating costs. This reduction in costs is to be achieved by a review of the delivery of corporate services and of the operating costs of the Planning Service.

It is the later review that has attracted considerable media and political attention as a reduction of c271 posts is required including over 160 P&T specialist planners. The Department has just launched a regrading scheme for these P&T officers to encourage them to apply to regrade to the General Service discipline. While early indications are that we may achieve 160 applications, or very close to that number, finding suitable posts for regraded staff in the wider NICS will be challenging. It is also clear that there will be no single solution to this problem but that a number of smaller actions coupled with the regrading scheme may help to find posts for a number of staff.

My purpose in writing to you is to investigate if there might be an opportunity for the secondment of specialist planners from the Planning Service to local Councils. I know from experience that some Councils in the past recruited their own specialist planners. I assume that on occasions Councils need the assistance of external consultants and it strikes me that there may be an opportunity here for local Councils to consider using available resources from within the Planning Service to meet this need for planning expertise and possibly reduce its own costs.

The majority of the Department's P&T planning staff are qualified to degree level and a significant number hold a Masters qualification in town & country planning. A large number are also members of the Royal Town Planning Institute. The grades of staff vary from the entry grade (PTO) to principal planners (Unified G7) and all staff will have a wide range of experience in Development Management and, or,

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cc - David

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Development Planning, including some staff who work in the strategic projects team or in conservation areas.

The Department is keen to keep this expertise with the NICS in the event that the economy turns a corner and there is an up turn in planning application numbers. The Department is also keen to keep the professional knowledge and skills of these staff honed by continuous professional development opportunities and hopefully collaboration between DOE and local Councils will aid this aim.

While I appreciate that even though there may be work for staff who could be seconded from the Planning Service, local Councils having the available finance is another issue altogether. However, I should be grateful if you would give some thought to the above and I would be more than happy to meet with you, or other SOLACE staff, to discuss this matter further.

Yours sincerely



**CHRIS WILSON**  
**HR & Organisational Change Division**

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