

Report to the Council

Committee: Cabinet

Date: 4 November 2014

Subject: Governance and Development Management

Portfolio Holder: Cllr J Philip

Recommending:

That the report of the Governance and Development Management Portfolio Holder be noted.

1. Development Management

Building Control is showing very good progress with current income £13,500 above budget at £43,248. This brings the average turnover to £36,353 per month as compared with the budgeted monthly requirement of £32,167.

Development Control continues to show a degree of resilience with income for September 2014 of £41,028. Although this was the lowest monthly income for Development Control in the 2014/15 year it was still £5,588 over budget.

The first six months of 2014/15 shows that Development Control averages £57,103 per month and their half year total constitutes 66.5% of the budget set for 2014/15 of £515 000. In other words Development Control income on planning applications is already £108,326 over the budget at this stage. This is not surprising given the total number of all planning related applications is nearly 300 up on this time last year.

2. Individual Voter registration (IER) – Progress Report

As has been reported before, Electoral staff are now in the final stages of the canvass using the new IER processes. This is the first year of this system and it has highlighted two initial issues:

- a) The Council are not seeing the registration of as many 16/17 year olds as would normally be expected despite efforts to identify them using a variety of engagement methods; and
- b) Electors registering at new addresses are not providing previous addresses so there is a chance of being registered twice in our area.

In order to address the issues, officers have taken the following action:

- 1) Officers have made an approach directly to the Cabinet Office to seek additional funding to undertake a write-out in early January to each property listing the electors we have on the register as at 1 December 2014 so that residents have the opportunity to make sure those who should be registered are, particularly as we are approaching a General Election. This process cannot be funded from current internal resources. The result of this request will be further reported once the outcome is known.
- 2) Extending staffing arrangements within the section as part of a Restructuring Phase II proposal to maintain higher staffing levels. The Council will apply in due course to the Cabinet Office for continuation funding in 2015/16. This process is thought to start in November 2014 with grant paid in April 2015. This will enable the rigorous chasing of changes to registrations throughout the year.

- 3) Officers recently attended 'Freshers Day' at Epping Forest College as part of a Council Team to speak to students about the need to register and have produced a leaflet aimed at this age group for distribution in schools with sixth form age students.

Officers continue to seek responses from the remaining 1000 electors that have not registered despite three approaches to them since August to update their information as they could not be otherwise be verified.

3. Information Service – Essex County Council SLA

The Information Service Level Agreement between Epping Forest District Council and Essex County Council continues to operate very successfully. During the first six months of the Financial Year to September 2014, Essex County Council assisted residents with District Council information and services on 35,815 occasions. The vast majority of these transactions involved the provision of recycling sacks. However, in accordance with the terms of the SLA, the Essex County Council Library Service also assisted residents with help on a wide variety of other District Council services including housing, Council Tax and Benefits, planning applications, electoral matters and environmental health issues.

The agreement provides for devolved District Council information services to residents through local libraries in Loughton, Waltham Abbey, Chipping Ongar and Buckhurst Hill. The District Council continues to provide information services directly from the main reception at the Civic Offices in Epping.

Epping Forest District Council achieved savings in the region of £43,000 when it replaced its own directly provided information centres in Waltham Abbey and Loughton with the County Council partnership. Under the terms of the SLA which commenced on 24 January 2013, ECC provides an enhanced service via its larger libraries in Loughton and Waltham Abbey and a 'lite' service from Buckhurst Hill and Chipping Ongar. Loughton and Waltham Abbey account for more than 82 per cent of visitor transactions.

Customers appreciate being able to access Council information in their local library rather than having to go to Epping. The fact that services are available six days a week at Loughton, or on Saturdays at the other three libraries is also helpful.

Although part of a separate agreement between the District and County Councils, (contained within the Finance portfolio), the payment kiosk at Waltham Abbey Library is also extremely well used. It has increased footfall and awareness of the library. The two agreements provide complimentary services and the library staff are very happy to help anyone who needs a hand or guidance in using the payment machine.

Library staff are familiar with and can assist residents in accessing services through the District Council website. Phone lines are provided with direct links between the libraries and the Civic Offices to enable members of the public to talk directly with the District Council on more complex issues beyond the scope of the library staff. The Library and District Council staff work very well together, updating each other as appropriate so that the service is as seamless as possible for local residents.

4. Local Land Charges

In response to a request from the Land Registry appropriate members of staff are meeting with representatives from the Land Registry on 4 November to discuss the impacts and practicalities of the proposed hand over of the Local Land Charges Register.

5. Legal Services: Prosecution Statistics

Members receive detailed updates of the Council's prosecutions in the Bulletin on a regular basis. Each case is an example of cooperative working within and across the Directorates.

By way of summary I set out the cases which have been successfully prosecuted since April this year.

HOUSING BENEFIT PROSECUTIONS

4 in total;

- 1) 2 years suspended prison sentence with 250 hours unpaid work. Costs awarded £950;
- 2) Fine £2875. Costs £450;
- 3) Curfew. Costs £200; and
- 4) 16 weeks imprisonment, no costs.

RIGHT TO BUY FRAUD PROSECUTIONS

- 1) 21 months suspended for 24 months
+ 100 hours unpaid work;
+ 12 months supervision; and
£100 Victim surcharge applied.
- 2) 12 months imprisonment;
9 months imprisonment to run concurrently;
£100 Victim surcharge applied; and
Costs reserved until the conclusion of the confiscation proceedings;

PLANNING PROSECUTIONS

- 1) Cutting down tree in conservation area - Fine £3500. Costs £380
- 2) Development to Listed building without consent – withdrawn as compliance achieved just before hearing.

FLYTIPPING / HANDING OVER WASTE

3 prosecutions – Total fines £867 Costs £1596.39.
1 withdrawn as accepted caution.

BREACHES OF ASBO

1 Case - 10 weeks imprisonment suspended for 1 year. Costs £180 (after Jury trial).
Defendant has subsequently been evicted for breach of tenancy conditions.

NOISE PROSECUTIONS

1 – Conditional discharge £230 costs

HEALTH AND SAFETY PROSECUTIONS

2 – total fines £18,000. Costs £13,988.96

STREET TRADING

2 – total fines £2,500. Costs £1384.73