

Report to the Council

Committee: Cabinet

Date: 19 February 2013

Portfolio Holder: Councillor S-A Stavrou
(Finance and Technology)

LOCAL LAND AND PROPERTY GAZETTEER

Recommending:

That a supplementary DDF estimate for 2012/13 in the sum of £100,000 be approved to provide the short term resources required to bring the Council's Local Land and Property Gazetteer up to the national standard by 31 March 2013.

1. The Local Land and Property Gazetteer arrangements for managing addressing accuracy are governed by the Data Co-operation Agreement (DCA), a contractual agreement between the Council and GeoPlace LLP, a Limited Liability Partnership jointly owned by the Improvement and Development Agency for Local Government (trading as Local Government Improvement and Development) and Ordnance Survey.
2. We have been advised that the Council's address management performance indicators are currently below national standards.
3. As a result we understand there is a very real possibility that the Council may be declared a Non Contributing Authority in terms of Address Updates Quality Criteria, Maintenance and Update Schedule as set out in the DCA. We have been advised that in addition, GeoPlace has the right in terms of the agreement to invoke "Emergency Measures" to implement an "Essential Support Plan" within such timescales and costs as are reasonable. The penalties that may be invoked range from sending a team of specialists to correct the Council's Addressing Management Information at £500 per person per day to charging the Council for all Ordnance Survey Mapping (currently free of charge) which could be as high as £40,000 - £60,000 per annum.
4. Whilst these appear to be extreme remedies, they have to be seen in the context of the DCA. Originally all local authorities had individual licences with Ordnance Survey and operated their own mapping systems. However, as the costs of licensing were becoming prohibitive, the Government negotiated to provide a national service. In effect, the system now is that all local authorities, and indeed a range of other agencies including the emergency services, have access to Ordnance Survey mapping data free of charge, but in return, through the DCA, local authorities agree that their local part of the Gazetteer and Address Database will be kept accurate and up to date. This updating process is critically important for the emergency services who are being required to discard their own bespoke systems, and use those provided via the DCA, and therefore rely upon the integrity of the underpinning Gazetteer and Address Database.
5. It has been made clear by GeoPlace that they are very concerned about the accuracy of this Council's LLPG, and they require the Council to meet the required standards by the end of March 2013, or risk their intervention. It is important to note at this time that the Council is not only failing to meet the current standard, but will also need to attain a higher standard which comes into effect from April 2013.

6. At a recent meeting between Council officers and GeoPlace a number of procedural changes were agreed, including the Council taking steps to ensure that no further errors in the Gazetteer would be generated. However, it is clear that at the current level of resourcing the Council will be unable to meet the deadline for improving the Gazetteer, and short term additional resources are required.

7. We have been informed that at the meeting, an assessment was undertaken of the scale of the Gazetteer errors and the resources required to eliminate them. Although some additional in-house resources have already been applied and progress has been made, it is clear that these are not sufficient. We understand that it has been estimated that some 150 days of work will be required just to meet the existing standard and probably nearer 250 days to place the Council in a position whereby it is able to meet the new higher standard which commences in April.

8. Due to the nature of the work, this updating exercise requires people who are knowledgeable of gazetteers and related systems. Furthermore, the time pressures in achieving the deadline do not afford the opportunity to appoint someone with aptitude and then train and bring them up to the necessary skill level. We have, therefore, considered the following options:

- (a) seek to appoint, on a temporary basis, persons with the requisite experience;
- (b) obtain resources from GeoPlace, having negotiated a reasonable daily rate; or
- (c) seek assistance from a neighbouring local authority who has already achieved the required standard and is able to provide us with skilled personnel, at a reasonable daily rate.

9. We have concluded that it is necessary to take immediate steps to correct the Gazetteer and Address Database through an injection of DDF funding. At this stage we believe it would be prudent to apply funding based upon the worse case scenario, which is GeoPlace applying special measures at £500 per day, but taking into account the existing available in-house resources. Based upon the estimated 250 days to achieve not only the existing required standard but also enable us to meet the higher standard, will require funding of £125,000. It is very likely that the costs will be less than this, either through negotiation with GeoPlace or through obtaining specialist assistance through one of the other routes. Also, the existing in-house resources referred to earlier will reduce that overall demand. Therefore, to provide certainty for the 2013/14 budget and equally important the necessary outcome, we are recommending that approval be given to a supplementary DDF estimate of £100,000.

10. We are conscious of the need to resource this work adequately in the future, once the immediate problems have been overcome. However, we propose to leave this issue for now, pending any future structure considerations by the Chief Executive.

11. We recommend as set out at the commencement of this report.