

Report to the Council

Committee: Cabinet

Date 21 February 2017

Subject: Governance and Development Management

Portfolio Holder: Councillor R. Bassett

Recommending:

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

1. Development Management

Development Control

Income for Development Control for December 2016 (period 9) was £107,295 which is £27,495 over budget.

Development Control's income from April to December 2016 was £777,632 and this constitutes 97% of the 2016/17 budget.

Projecting the budget forward it is considered that DC will be able to reach £950,000 for the 2016/17 year and to achieve this they will need an average income of £58,000 per month from January to March 2017 (January/February and March 2016 averaged £69,000).

It is also likely that DC will be able to exceed a combined income of over £1,000,000 for the 2016/17 year, inclusive of paid Pre-Application Fees.

Building Control

Building Control's income for December 2016 was £22,760 slightly exceeding the £22,450 budget requirement.

December has traditionally been a lower income month for Building Control and the average December income for three years prior to 2016/17 has been £22,247.

BC remains on track to not only exceed the 2016/17 budget of £425,000 but to also match or come very close to the previous year's successful turnover of £473,000 (2015/16). To do this BC will need an average turnover each month of £36,000 for January/February and March 2017.

This continuing impressive performance is clearly reflective of the property market and demand. However the response of the teams to the increased demands has been consistently commendable.

Building Control of course operate in a commercial environment where private sector companies compete for work. To ensure that the team continues to be competitive and to address the need for succession planning I have recently agreed to apply some of the excess resource in the ring fenced account to improve turn round times for plan vetting and to train our existing staff in a more formal way.

2. Internal audit

Audit and Governance Committee received a report at its meeting on the 6 February of the result of our internal audit shared service performance against the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS) which came into effect in April 2013. The overall conclusion of the external assessor was that Internal Audit complies with the PSIAS and continues to provide an effective and efficient service to each Council (Epping Forest, Harlow and Broxbourne).

There are some suggested actions identified by the external assessor which would enhance service provision but these do not affect the overall level of compliance with the PSIAS, but do ensure Internal Audit continues to develop and demonstrate best practice. The team is considering these and working on an action plan to address them but I wanted to highlight this example of a genuine shared service which has saved money and improved standards. I congratulate all involved in the achievement.

3. Corporate Fraud team

Since my last report on this area of Governance a further six Right to Buy applications have been stopped or withdrawn following Corporate Fraud Team intervention. The total discount saved as a result of this is approximately £467,400 and the value of retained rent revenue streams is around £275,184.

In addition, another four properties have been recovered as a result of fraud intervention, involving suspected subletting and / or non-residency. This has resulted in a saving of approximately £72,000.

The Corporate Fraud Team has stopped a housing application due to the discovery of false/misleading information.

The Team is currently engaged in a number of criminal investigations including active money laundering investigations. Three criminal prosecutions are being heard early in 2017, each involving Proceeds of Crime Act (POCA) proceedings, currently estimated to be around £287,000 if successful.

The Corporate Fraud Team is conducting a money laundering case on behalf of Broxbourne Borough Council, involving planning fraud.

The Team hosted their third Eastern Corporate Fraud Group (ECFG) on 26 January 2017. The aim of the group, which is open to corporate fraud investigators from all Eastern region councils, is to promote professional standards and share learning.

4. Legal Services

On the theme of working together with others the Legal Team at this Council undertook the prosecution of fly-tipping prosecutions on behalf of Braintree District Council as well as this Council. Evidence was gathered by this Council's Environment & Neighbourhood team and Braintree District Council Environmental Enforcement Officers which led to prosecutions in Chelmsford Magistrates Court on 19th January 2017 against Mr. Sam Russell. He pleaded guilty to offences in relation to waste deposited by him on a public right of way in Hastingwood and on land in Wickham Bishops Road Hatfield Peverel. Mr Russell admitted to the fly tipping of 3 loads of waste from his Vauxhall Combo van at Hastingwood and between 10 and 15 black sacks of rubbish in Wickham Bishops Road Hatfield Peverel which is with the Braintree District Council area.

I am grateful that the Magistrates when convicting him publicly stated the flytipping was 'morally and environmentally wrong.'

Mr Russell was sentenced to a 12 month community order with 150 hours unpaid work to be completed in that time. He was also ordered to pay the combined costs of Epping Forest District Council and Braintree District Council totalling £1983.72 together with a Victim Surcharge of £85.