

BUILDING CONTROL SERVICES- UPDATE

Planning Advisory Committee - 19 April 2016

Report of Chief Officer Environmental and Operational Services

Status: For information

Key Decision: No

Executive Summary: This report provides an overview of the Building Control Services, background, performance and future considerations.

This report supports the Key Aim of Safe Communities

Portfolio Holder Cllr. Piper

Contact Officer Kevin Tomsett - ext: 7368

Recommendation to Planning Advisory Committee:

That the contents of the report be noted.

Introduction and Background

- 1 The Building Control Service ensures that buildings are designed and constructed in accordance with the Building Regulations and associated legislation.
- 2 Building Regulations set standards for the design and construction of buildings to ensure the health and safety for people in or around those buildings. They also include requirements to ensure that fuel and power is conserved and that facilities are provided for people, including those with disabilities, to access and move around inside buildings.
- 3 On the 1st October 2014 Sevenoaks District Council and Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council entered into a joint working arrangement and formed the Building Control Partnership.
- 4 The Partnership aimed to build on the previous successful shared Management arrangements in building control, achieve efficiency savings for both Authorities and significantly increase the resilience for the Building Control Service by amalgamating two small teams into one larger team covering both authorities. It was also intended that the Partnership would enable both councils to fulfil their statutory obligations, meet agreed service

standards and be more competitive in attracting additional fee earning work.

Team Structure

- 5 An important step was the identification of the appropriate level of staffing resource for the new arrangements. A process of staff consultations and recruitment took place resulting in the following structure which is formed by employees of both councils:

Building Control Manager - 1 FTE

Team Leaders - 2 FTE

Senior Surveyor - 1 FTE

Surveyors - 5 FTE

Technical Administration - 3 FTE

Total FTE - 12.0

- 6 The previous FTE across both services was 15.5 and so efficiency savings were achieved. Both teams were holding vacancies and all existing surveyors were accommodated in the Partnership Teams, while some administrative staff elected for redeployment elsewhere within the Councils.
- 7 The administration hub is hosted at SDC with 'hot desk' functionality available for the area surveyors and the Building Control Manager at the Kings Hill council offices and at the office in Tonbridge Castle. It was considered important that a presence was retained at both council offices for customers' interaction and for operational purposes. To date this approach is working well and there have been numerous occasions when the surveyors have worked flexibly across both Council areas to accommodate peaks in demand, holidays or sickness.

Key Achievements

- 8 Working in Partnership has enabled the development of a number of initiatives and benefits, which will help deliver improved ways of working, further efficiencies and are described below:
- 9 Delivery of Shared Idox Uniform System - it was decided that as both council's used separate IDOX Uniform systems the priority would be to form a shared Uniform system and merge both datasets. This would enable the standardisation of letter templates, fee tables, inspection record keeping etc. The shared system would assist staff in accessing applications and cross boundary working rather than accessing two separate IT environments. Following a successful bid for £90,000 from the DCLG Transformation Challenge Award funding we were able to progress this. Idox were employed and a working group formed, comprising representatives from Building

Control and both IT Services, which resulted in the launch of the Shared System in November 2015.

- 10 Enterprise Performance Management - Idox Enterprise is a performance monitoring and management solution fully integrated with the BC Uniform database, as described above. Enterprise enables the monitoring of surveyors cases and the teams overall workload. The team leaders and manager are able to reallocate workload to deal with fluctuations and staff absence. Tasks have been set up to align with statutory and other key performance targets which track applications and warn in advance of impending target dates. Enterprise has been in place since November 2015 and process efficiencies are already being delivered e.g. tracking and payment of invalid applications and completion of site inspection records.
- 11 Mobile Working - to realise the efficiencies of the Partnership the surveyor areas were reviewed and changed to reflect workload, density, transport links and office locations. The surveying team now operates across Council boundaries and officers have been provided with laptop computers and mobile devices to enable remote working.
- 12 Electronic Correspondence - a full review of each council's letter templates commenced in October 2014 with a view of creating one set of newly branded letters and certificates. The letters have, where appropriate, been updated to reflect a more customer friendly tone and simplified English. All new letter templates are set up to email directly to the applicant or agent and automatically save into the document management system. All approval and completion certificates have also been redesigned to visually represent a 'certificate'. This project is approximately 70% complete and the ability to email all acknowledgement, application and decision letters will save significant time and create cost savings.
- 13 LABC Partner Agents - the BC Service is in competition with the private sector and the BC team has concentrated on retaining key agents whilst looking at opportunities to attract others and therefore increase revenue. In the past year the team have added a further two well respected local Architectural practices to bring a total of thirteen Agents who have entered into partnership agreement through the LABC scheme. This arrangement enables the BC team to carry out plan appraisals for any projects located in the country with site inspections being carried out by the local council.
- 14 Dangerous Structures - The Council is committed to responding to any dangerous structure within 2 hours of receipt. Having a larger pool of Surveyors available has enabled the Partnership to introduce a formal weekly rota and the ability to call upon others for assistance.

Future Considerations

- 15 Looking ahead there are a number of service improvements planned, these are:

- Online Application form fully integrated into Uniform and Payment system;
- Online payment facility for inspection fee invoices;
- Public Access for Approval and Completion certificates;
- Review of BC Standard Charges; and
- Marketing Strategy.

Performance

16 Please see Appendix A.

Charges

- 17 Direct costs associated with the Partnership are pooled and shared between the authorities on the basis of income generated by each authority in the 2013/14 Financial Year. This equates to a 45:55 split TMBC:SDC and has been adopted as a model for the first three years of the partnership.
- 18 The government requires local authority charges for building regulation work to cover the cost of the service only. Therefore the BC fees reflect the work involved on a project type basis. As neither council has updated the BC fee charges since 2013 the BC Service has decided to review the cost of providing the service based on the Fee Regulations and CIPFA guidance. The review will recalculate the chargeable officer hourly rate and will be used along with historic data on the number of site inspection for various project types to update the standard charges. The Partnership also offers individually determined charges and bespoke quotations. Its intended that the updated fee charges schedule will be in place for 1st October 2016.

Key Implications

Financial

The Net budget for 2015/16 for SDC was a surplus of £159,348, comprising of income from plan and site inspections totalling £457,314, however the budget in 2015/16 contained income from the previous shared management arrangements which will not be realised as the shared service commenced on 1 October 2014, this income line has been removed from the 2016/17 budget.

Legal Implications and Risk Assessment Statement

The Building Control Service is a Statutory Service governed by The Building Act 1984.

Equality Assessment

There are no equalities impacts arising from this report.

Appendices

Appendix A - Performance

Background Papers:

None

Richard Wilson

Chief Officer Environmental and Operational Services