

**TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL**  
**PLANNING and TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY BOARD**

**12 January 2016**

**Report of the Director of Planning, Housing and Environmental Health**

**Part 1- Public**

**Matters for Recommendation to Cabinet - Non-Key Decision (Decision may be taken by the Cabinet Member)**

**1 BUILDING CONTROL SHARED SERVICE**

**Summary**

**This report provides details of the progress that has been made since the start of the Building Control Partnership with Sevenoaks District Council (SDC) in October 2014.**

**1.1 Introduction and Background**

1.1.1 On the 1<sup>st</sup> October 2014 the Council and SDC entered into a joint working arrangement and formed the Building Control Partnership. Details of the new Partnership were provided to Members of this Advisory Board and the Finance, Property and Innovation Advisory Board in June and July respectively last year.

1.1.2 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.

**1.2 Organisational Structure**

1.2.1 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	1.0
Team Leader	2.0
Senior BC Surveyor	1.0
Surveyor	5.0
Technical Admin Support	3.0
TOTAL Full Time Equivalentents (FTE)	12.0

- 1.2.2 The previous FTE across both services was 15.5 and so efficiency savings were achieved. Happily both teams were holding vacancies and all existing surveyors were accommodated in the Partnership Teams, while the Council's administrative staff elected for redeployment elsewhere in the Council.
- 1.2.3 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.

### 1.3 Achievements

- 1.3.1 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:
- 1.3.2 **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 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.
- 1.3.3 **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.
- 1.3.4 **Electronic Site Inspection Diary** - all site inspection requests are now booked through a centralised calendar system, which is maintained, by the administrative team and SDC contact centre. The calendar provides full access to all officer diaries and enables the efficient allocation of appointments.
- 1.3.5 **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.

- 1.3.6 **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 per cent complete and the ability to email all acknowledgement, application and decision letters will save significant time and create cost savings.
- 1.3.7 **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. We will be in a position to quantify the contribution these partnerships have made to income by the end of the financial year.
- 1.3.8 **Performance Standards** - throughout the transitional period the BC teams have continued to provide a customer focused service by meeting same day inspection requests, plan checking and statutory decision dates. The Enterprise Performance Management System will allow the Manager to further develop this aspect.
- 1.3.9 **Dangerous Structures** - The Council is committed to responding to any dangerous structure within two 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.

#### 1.4 **Proposed Service Improvements for the next 12 months**

- 1.4.1 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.

## 1.5 Legal Implications

1.5.1 None

## 1.6 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

- 1.6.1 Direct costs associated with the Partnership will be 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 would be adopted as a model for the first three years of the partnership.
- 1.6.2 The estimates being presented to the Finance, Innovation and Property Advisory Board on 13<sup>th</sup> January reflect the partnership agreement.
- 1.6.3 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 1<sup>st</sup> April 2016.

## 1.7 Risk Assessment

- 1.7.1 The benefits on service delivery, resilience and flexibility have been strongly demonstrated over the last 12 months. The Partnership Agreement will minimise exposure to risk.

## 1.8 Equality Impact Assessment

- 1.8.1 The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the substance of the Equality Act. There is no perceived impact on end users.

## 1.9 Recommendations

1.9.1 It is recommended that:

- 1) The progress with the shared service arrangements be **NOTED**;
- 2) The proposed Service improvements for 2016/17 are **ENDORSED**; and
- 3) The approach to reviewing fees and charges are **APPROVED**.

The Director of Planning, Housing and Environmental Health confirms that the proposals contained in the recommendation(s), if approved, will fall within the Council's Budget and policy Framework.

Background papers:

Nil

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