

POLICY, FINANCE AND ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE

24TH JANUARY 2018

REPORT OF HEAD OF STRATEGIC PLANNING AND REGULATORY SERVICES

PLANNING APPLICATION FEES

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 The purpose of this report is to advise the Committee of the Government's intended increase in fees for planning applications and to recommendations as to the proposed expenditure of the resulting increased revenue.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

- (i) **The Committee agrees to the proposed recommendations as set out at para 3.5 of this report below as part of the wider budget setting exercise for 2018/19**
- (ii) **The staffing establishment is amended to include the additional posts described at para. 3.5 below.**

3.0 KEY ISSUES

3.1 Members may recall that publicity was given to a Government proposal in early 2017 to increase the statutory fees paid for planning applications. This was subsequently postponed but the Government has now announced that it will take effect on 17th January 2018, and has published a Statutory Instrument accordingly.

3.2 The increase of 20% applies 'across the board' for the fees paid by applicants for Planning Applications and similar (n.b it does not affect the various exemptions or concessions within the legislation, and relates solely to planning application fees as opposed to other sources of income , e.g 'pre application' discussions).

3.3 It is anticipated that this will amount to some £130,000 additional income per annum, based on existing fees receipt levels within the 2017/18 budget (£600,000 in total , which is likely to be exceeded) and that proposed for 2018/19 (£650,000).

3.4 When initially promoted, the Government required assurance that the additional income would be directed to activity that would assist improving planning performance and would be genuinely 'extra' within budget arrangements. The Council subscribed to these terms and completed certification accordingly. The new legislation explains that the subscriptions submitted in 2017 is sufficient to enable the Council to receive the increased fee level from 17th January 2018, that no new certification is required and that the 'terms' subscribed to in 2017 still apply.

3.5 It is proposed that the income is dedicated to the following areas:

Development Control:

- (i) Administrative support (1 FTE): to enable a faster and more responsive level of service to be provided to the initial stages of application receipt, i.e their importation, registration and filing. Administrative support for the Development Control function currently comprised 4 officers which operate on 'pooled' basis for the services within the Regulatory Services Service area, i.e, shared with Land Charges, Licensing, Building Control and Environmental Health. This capacity has been static since 2011, during which time workload has

substantially increased and it has been difficult to maintain standards of service in this scenario. I has been assisted by advancement in the use of technology (e.g electronic application submissions) but the efficiencies secured are far outstripped by increases in workload overall. For example, the number of planning applications receive in 2011 was 994 and in 2017 was 1571 During the same period applications in other areas has also increased, albeit not by the same margin.

- (ii) Technical Officers (0.5FTE FTE): similar to the above, in order to maintain service levels commensurate with the increase in caseload. The key issue here is the validation of planning applications which has, through successive amendments to legislation, become more demanding and requires greater analysis of submissions and liaison with applicants in order to produce 'competent' submissions that can then be processed effectively. It is proposed that this additional post is combined with the re-designation of current vacant post (0.4 FTE Applications and Advice manager) in order to create a 'whole' FTE post.
- (iii) Senior Planning Officer (1 FTE): the pressure her is in relation to the profile of applications and the growing 'delivery agenda'. Whilst increases in overall workload wads responded to by an additional officer post created 2016/17, there remain significant demands dealing with larger scale , more complex, application sites, particularly those relating to housing proposals and the extent of public interest, contention and complexity of issue that they create. Using the same comparison as able, the number of 'major' housing application s has risen from 2 in 2011, to 26 in 2015 and 32 in 2017. Aligned to this, housing proposals are a critical element of the Council's growth ambitions communicated through the Local Plan and it is considered high priority that we are able to navigate them speedily and effectively through the system in order to deliver the housing and infrastructure benefits associated with them.
- (iv) Local Plans; additional support to the Local Plan team for the ongoing work in relation to the completion of the Local Plan and subsequent Supplementary Planning Documents, our involvement in strategic matters such as the Strategic Growth Plan and delivery of Community Infrastructure Levy which again will be critical to the delivery of Local Plan objectives including the MMDR. The work of the team is broad and varied and it is considered this investment is best expressed as a financial sum rather than a specific post, allowing for flexibility of its use whether for staff, research or consultancy resources etc.
- (v) An annual 'innovation fund' for the development of planning services. This is identified as a potential remedy to the difficulties our planning team has faced in seeking to secure service development initiatives in the context of a high and growing technical workload as explained above. Most obviously it would be used to improve service provision by digital channels, seeking to emulate the success, for example., of the Local Plan website both in terms of presentation and its effectiveness as an engagement tool and extending 'reach' through linkage with social media. In addition, it has proved difficult to keep pace with the digital service offer provided by our key suppliers due to the timetables associated with budget setting in comparison to the release of new products. Whilst digital service delivery is referred to as an example here, it would not be restricted to projects of this nature and could also relate to projects such as:
 - Community engagement and information
 - Innovations to process and procedures
 - Local Development Orders
 - Article 4 Directions
 - Campaigns, e.g. promoting innovative design and energy efficiency/low

- carbon development
- Legal processes

4.0 POLICY AND CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The additional income will make a strong contribution to our planning performance. Planning (both Local Plans and Development Management) are key activities towards corporate priorities particularly in respect of the strength of the economy, improved connectivity (including the MMDR) delivery of housing to meet the Borough's needs (including affordable housing).

5.0 FINANCIAL AND OTHER RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The increase will be permanent and as such 'recurring' in budgetary terms, allowing for sustained investment in the areas concerned.

5.2 The estimated cost of the investments described at para 3.5 above are as follows:

Title	Salary estimate	NI estimate	Pension costs estimate	Overheads estimate	TOTAL
Administrative Officer	17,750	1,400	4,000	3,000	26,150
Technical Officer	9,900	750	2,100	3,000	15,750
Senior Planning Officer	35,000	3,700	7,700	3,000	49,400
Local Plans	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	25,000
'Innovation Fund'	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	10,000
TOTAL					126,300

5.3 The Development Management function operates under a strict performance regime overseen by CLG. Whilst our performance has been adequate for these purposes to date, investment can only assist in maintaining and improving this decision. However we should be equally concerned that performance is measured by 'results on the ground' and any investment in service provision will be focussed on securing improved outcomes for our community and our customers.

Subject to approval, these will be incorporated into the budget put forward to the Council on 7th February 2018.

6.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

7.0 EQUALITIES

7.1 No Equalities Implications have been identified.

8.0 **RISKS**

8.1 The risks identifies below are the potential outcomes:

L I K E L I H O O D	A	Very High				
	B	High				
	C	Significant				
	D	Low				
	E	Very Low		1		
	F	Almost Impossible				
			Negligible 1	Marginal 2	Critical 3	Catastrophic 4
IMPACT						

Risk No	Risk Description
1	Investment fails to improve planning performance

9.0 **CLIMATE CHANGE**

9.1 There are no specific climate change implications.

10.0 **WARDS AFFECTED**

10.1 Works could take place in any ward in the Borough.

Contact Officer: J Worley – Head of Strategic Planning and Regulatory Services
 Date: 11th January 2018

Appendices : None

Background Papers: None

Reference : PFA