

Report to the Council

Committee: Cabinet

Date: 17 February 2015

Subject: Governance and Development Management

Portfolio Holder: Councillor J Philip

Recommending:

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

Members Electronic Communications

The Local Government (Electronic Communications) Order (England) 2015, which enables the use of electronic communications to local authority members, will come into force on the 30th January.

Members may recall that in 2012 officers brought a report to the Constitution Panel on proposals for a move towards paperless agenda. Research at that time, together with an opinion of Counsel on the matter, revealed that the law actually made emailing papers to Councillors illegal, even if a councillor did not want paper copies.

At that time members asked officers to write on behalf of the Council to Minister Eric Pickles to see if he would change the law. Officer argued that the original law predated and could not have predicted the internet. The Country was using a law that was 40 years out of date.

Officers sought support from colleagues in other Councils and 17 authorities joined Epping Forest in their request for change. Since 2012 officers have pursued the matter with the minister and department on several occasions, sought support from the Association of Democratic Services Officers (ADSO) and used social media by tweeting at #askpickles Select Committee appearances during 2014.

On 7 January 2015 the order was laid before parliament. The Order modifies provisions in Schedule 12 to the Local Government Act 1972 (c. 70).

Allowing members to become more digital is an important part of giving elected members the tools they need to effectively operate and communicate. Officers will be looking at how this might be implemented during 2015-16 together with training for members as part of the members training programme. It is worth noting that this is a permissive order, that is it allows the use of electronic media it does not mandate it.

Individual Elector Registration (IER) Update

In my report to the November 2014 Council, I reported that the IER canvas had been completed but had highlighted two issues:

- a) The Council were not seeing the registration of as many 16/17 year olds as would normally be expected despite efforts to identify them using a variety of engagement methods; and

- b) Electors registering at new addresses are not providing previous addresses so there is a chance of being registered twice in our area.

These problems were as a direct result of the new legislative processes.

Officers made an approach directly to the Cabinet Office in November 2014 to seek additional funding to undertake a 'write-out' in early January to each property listing the electors we have on the register as at 1 December 2014 so that residents had the opportunity to make sure those who should be registered were, particularly as we are approaching a General Election.

The Cabinet Office made 'Maximising Registration' funding of £7,800 available in January and by utilising savings on other grants, officers were able to commission individual 'House Notification Letters' to each household which have now been delivered.

Initial results suggest that some 350 people have been able to be added to the registers in January that would otherwise not been able to vote in May. Likewise many hundreds of 'carried over' registrations have been able to be deleted by this process. The likely end position is that changes to the register will be in the thousands.

Development Management Update

Building Control continues to show good signs of recovery demonstrating a turnover of £25,442 for December 2014 which is £4,282 above budget. This compares favourably with the Three Year average of £23,279 and is significantly higher than the actual £19,036 for December 2013.

With a Year to Date turnover of £311,673 they require £74,327 to meet budget. The average monthly turnover is £34,630 which is higher than the budgeted average monthly figure of £32,166.

All they require is an average turnover for the last three months of the financial year of £24,775 to meet budget.

However based on their average actual turnover it is likely that they will finish the year with a turnover of approximately £415,000 and if this is achieved, then they are in line to achieve a surplus of £29,000 above budget.

This is an excellent position for Building Control to be in, given the significant staffing difficulties they have experienced against a background of a diminishing market share for Building Control Survey work.

Development Control (DC) continues to demonstrate a high rate of applications resulting in very good monthly turnover figures.

The latest turnover for DC for December 2014 was £77,534. Their Year to Date turnover of £594,226 already exceeds the budgeted turnover target of £515,000 by nearly £80,000.

Their average monthly turnover for the nine months of 2014/15 is £66,025, it is reasonable to assume that DC may well end up with a surplus of £594,000 plus £180,000 which equates to approximately £770,000 for the year.

If this happens, the surplus above budget may be as high as £250,000 for the year which will represent a really good income result for Development Control. In addition, pre-planning application fees for the year to the end of January are £76,000.