

Report to the Council

Committee: Cabinet

Date: 28 July 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

1. Electoral Registration and IER progress update

On 13 July the Council commenced the annual electoral canvass under the second year of its transitional arrangements for Individual Electoral Registration (IER). Unlike last year when the government had allowed arrangements to apply where if a previously registered elector matched information retained by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) the authority could automatically register them, this year the process will require true individual responses from all households.

Under a Portfolio Holder decision issued recently our printing contract, together with improved online registration methods, has been issued to ERS the parent company of the Council's electoral management software provider.

Each house will receive:

- (a) A household enquiry form (HEF) and three reminders if they fail to respond.
- (b) Invitation to register (ITRs) for any new identified or altered electors from the HEF forms returns and individual reminders; and
- (c) Personal canvassing of non-responders at the latter stages of the canvass.

It is hoped that all members will help in promoting the need to register this year particularly as nationally there are 1.9 million voters identified as being carried forward by transitional arrangements. This means that they will disappear from registers unless they engage in this process. This year's register also has two additional important factors: (1) It will provide the Government a base line figure for their forthcoming review of Parliamentary boundaries; and (2) It could be the register on which the referendum on Britain's membership of the EU is based.

I am very proud to say that Epping Forest is the best in the country with our current register. We are in the good position of having the lowest number of such 'carried forward' electors and through hard work by our elections staff, the highest levels of voter matching in the Country (as recently identified by the Electoral Commission).

The Council will continue in its efforts to promote registration particularly in the age attainers group.

2. Development Management

Building Control

Income for July 2015 is £49,309 (£12,409 above budget of £36,900). With an end of year projection of £403,338 (3 months actual and 9 months budget) BC is currently on course to finish the year £17,000 over budget, which is encouraging news at such an early stage of the financial year.

Development Control

Income for July 2015 is £57,047 (£22,077 above budget of £34,970). The projection for the year end (3 months actual and 9 months budget) is £661,219, an increase over budget of £66,219. This perhaps is not surprising given the number of planning related applications received are as high as this last time last year.

The first three months income of £197,539 is already over 33% of the total budget. The team continues to perform at a high level –maintaining not only a healthy income – but quality decision making as efficiently as possible.

3. Enforcement

The Enforcement Team is now up to full strength with the recruitment of a third Enforcement Officer. Workload, in the sense of matters reported for the team to investigate, is up on this quarter in 2014, and there has been a significant spike in complicated listed building cases being referred from ECC.

There are a number of enforcement and other notices and prosecutions being processed at this time. By way of example only, a Temporary Stop Notice has been served on 20 Ollards Grove Loughton to stop works commenced without a discharge of conditions. Also a successful prosecution was taken against the owner of 66 Bower Hill in Epping for damage to a protected tree with fines and costs of over £1400 being awarded. This case involved Tree Officers, Enforcement Officers and Legal Officers.

The Principal Officer gave a presentation on enforcement to members as part of the planning training package and a perception of lack of enforcement action on some cases was raised. The long time spans of investigations was explained, and it is proposed to produce an annual report on enforcement matters to give a fuller overview of the sections work to Councillors.

Councillors are also invited to talk to the case officer if they have concerns over individual complaints or need an update.

It is also the case that the Enforcement team take a proactive approach to their work such that a report or concern may not result in an Enforcement Notice and/or prosecution – a more visible demonstration of their impact- because constructive advice is issued and the member of the public complies within a reasonable time period.