

Report to the Council

Committee: Cabinet

Date: 3 November 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

Work by the Council's Electoral Services team continues on the canvass. Work to ensure residents respond to the House Enquiry Form process has meant that 95% of households have responded. Over the last week or so, personal canvassers have been visiting properties yet to respond.

It is pleasing to note that the Council's adoption of online registration has meant that 43% of all respondents have used this method of registration. Of those an additional 2,500 residents have used this system to make the personal changes required to their individual registrations.

However there remains 260 people on the register that were carried over from last years transition as 'non-matched reds' meaning they could not be matched to DWP data or responded to letters last year (or indeed again this year) which will be removed from the register in December if they do not respond by the end of the canvass.

Individual registration remains problematical with many non-responders just about to receive their last reminders to register. It is hoped that the personal canvass will capture some of these people. It is also intended to repeat the successful 'write out' letters in the new year in a bid to capture additional changes that might be required. This process is not without cost and will be subject to funding being available.

In terms of the budget provision, with the early end to government support grant, the Council faces a significant challenge for 2016/17. It is apparent that the true costs of the new system is much higher than anticipated and officers are working with accountancy to ascertain the true expenditure picture in light of operational canvass experience.

2. Development Management

Building Control Income

Building Control 2015/16 budget is £386 000 with the year to date income of £240 258, which comprises of 62% of the years projected budget income for a six month period.

As a result income is currently £20 000 over budget and indications from Building Control is that applications are continuing at a similar level to the corresponding period for the previous year.

Indications are that Building Control may well end the year between £475 000 and £500 000 which is a conservative estimate as there are six months left in the current financial year.

Development Control Income

Development Control continues to show encouraging levels of income this year. Actual income during this period constitutes 71% for the first six months.

The current income of £420 000 (at 6 months) compares favourably with the overall yearly budget of £595 000.

Six months actual income plus six months budget are indications that DC should turnover at least £800 000 for the 2015/16 year. However, it is likely that at this rate, DC income will even exceed last years turnover of £813 000.

Income Summary

Both DC and BC are showing strong signs of resilience with income above budget and planning/building control applications exceeding and/or matching like for like periods last year. Costs continue to be carefully monitored and workload remains at a high level, putting more strain on officers to achieve deadlines and cope with demand.

3. Webcasting

Cabinet on 8 October saw the soft launch test of the new webcasting system cameras in the chamber. The new system of four, rather than three, HD webcast cameras allows high quality image capture.

Members may be interested to know that online viewing continues to rise year on year. In the last few days Epping Forest Council hosted a very successful youth conference. The afternoon session included a debate on the EU which has been viewed nearly 2,000 times.

In the year to 21 October 2015 viewing figure are at 64,000 for the year. This is up 12,000 viewers on the comparable period in 2013/14.

Officers are now in the process of testing our HD portable equipment and it is hoped that this equipment will be used for an external meeting this month.

4. Website links Improved

The restructure within Public Relations is paying dividends in terms of the Council's website. It is just over three months since the appointment of Amy Rose as the Council's new Digital Content Officer.

Just two months into the job she received a large box of free doughnuts from Site Improve who measure various website parameters including the number of broken links and misspellings. Thanks to Amy, the Council eliminated every single broken link and misspelling from the website.

It is of course a never ending job but as of 19 October the Council website had 2,728 pages with no misspellings. And of the 16,005 links only 2 were broken. The news element of the website was entirely free of such errors. Needless to say the rest of the PR team has taken Amy, and the doughnuts, very much to their hearts.