



**Development Control
Committee**

**Thursday, 15 June
2017**

**Matter for
Information**

Title: Housing White Paper: Increase in Planning Fees in the Borough

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1. Introduction

The Government published its Housing White Paper 'Fixing our broken housing market' on 7 February 2017. It provides the context for local authorities to increase the nationally set planning fees by 20% from July 2017.

2. Recommendations

That Members note a 20% increase in planning fees in the Borough with effect from July 2017 in order to invest this additional fee income in the planning department.

3. Information

- 3.1. The Housing White Paper 'Fixing our broken housing market' includes proposals for boosting local authority capacity and capability to deliver, improving the speed and quality with which planning cases are handled, while deterring unnecessary appeals.
- 3.2. Following the publication of the White Paper, the Council received a letter from the Department of Communities and Local Government on 21 February 2017 inviting the Council to increase the nationally set planning fees by 20%. This is on the basis that the additional fee income is invested in the planning department. This recognises the difficulties in recruiting and retaining planners and others with specialist skills and is intended to boost local authority capacity and capability to deliver.
- 3.3. The Borough Council's planning department has first-hand experience of the issues that the additional fee income is intended to tackle. Over the last 18 months the department has lost a number of very experienced planning staff. A loss of skills, experience and local knowledge such as this is particularly challenging in terms of continuing to be able to offer a good quality of service to residents and developers and maintaining performance, for example in terms of meeting statutory timescales. It has often been necessary to employ agency staff at significant additional cost to the Council. Whilst this approach provides some short term resource, it does not assist with resourcing the department and in building resilience in the long term.
- 3.4. The additional fee income will be extremely valuable in supporting and developing the planning department in a number of ways including:
 - Improving working practices to assist in retaining experienced staff;
 - Provision of planning and specialist skills to support and improve resilience of the Council's planning function; and
 - Improving the use of information technology in the department to enable a more efficient service.

- 3.5. The Department of Communities and Local Government has confirmed that the additional fee income can be invested in both Strategic/Local Planning and Development Management. It acknowledges that both elements of planning departments within local authorities are important to ensure the delivery of the Government's proposals set out in the Housing White Paper.
- 3.6. The Government's letter required the Council's Section 151 Officer to reply indicating the Council's intention to increase planning fees by 20% and to confirm that the amount raised through these higher fees will be spent entirely on planning functions. This was provided by the Chief Finance Officer (Section 151 Officer) to the Department of Communities and Local Government on 9 March 2017.
- 3.7. Given that planning fees are nationally set, the Government is currently in the process of making the necessary amendments to the Regulations to enable planning fees to be increased. As soon as this process is complete, the Council will be able to start charging the higher fees. The Government has indicated that this will be in July 2017.

Background Documents:-

None.

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Implications	
Financial (MHo)	The amount of additional income each year will vary dependent upon the fee income received. For 2017/18 the estimated income generated from planning application fees is £190,000. A 20% increase to this amount would result in an additional income of £38,000.
Legal (AC)	The Government is to amend the Regulations to enable local authorities to increase the nationally set planning fees by 20%.
Risk (AT)	No implications.
Corporate Priorities (AT)	The increased planning fees will assist in delivering effective service provision. This will further all of the other corporate priorities, particularly balanced economic development and green and safe places.
Vision and Values (AT)	The increased planning fees will enable the Council to further its values in relation to customer focus and innovation.
Equalities (AT)	No implications.
	Equality Assessment:- <input type="checkbox"/> Initial Screening <input type="checkbox"/> Full Assessment <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Not Applicable