



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

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1. Introduction

- 1.1. 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.
- 1.2. This report was considered and noted by the Council's Development Control Committee on 15 June 2017.

2. Recommendation(s)

It is recommended that following the Council's Section 151 Officer's reply to the Department of Communities and Local Government on 9 March 2017, Members note a 20% increase in planning fees in the Borough 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 21st 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 is in recognition of 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 Martin Hone to the Department of Communities and Local Government on 9th 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.

Background Documents:

Report entitled 'Housing White Paper: Increase in Planning Fees in the Borough' by the Planning Development and Regeneration Manager to the Development Control Committee on 15 June 2017.

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Implications Housing White Paper: Increase in Planning Fees in the Borough	
Finance	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.
Martin Hone Interim Chief Finance Officer / Section 151 Officer	
Legal	The Government is to amend the Regulations to enable local authorities to increase the nationally set planning fees by 20%.
Martin Hone Interim Chief Finance Officer / Section 151 Officer	
Corporate Risk(s) (CR)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Decreasing Financial Resources (CR1) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Regulatory Governance (CR6)
Adrian Thorpe Planning Development and Regeneration Manager	
Corporate Priorities (CP)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Effective Service Provision (CP2) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Balanced Economic Development (CP3)
Adrian Thorpe Planning Development and Regeneration Manager	
Vision & Values (V)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Innovation (V4) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Customer Focus (V5) Providing the grant will assist in service improvements through effective innovation and customer focus.
Adrian Thorpe Planning Development and Regeneration Manager	
Equalities & Equality Assessment(s) (EA)	Not applicable.
Adrian Thorpe Planning Development and Regeneration Manager	<input type="checkbox"/> Initial EA Screening <input type="checkbox"/> Full EA Assessment <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Not Applicable