

Committee: Environment Committee

Agenda Item

Date: Tuesday 16 March 2010

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Title: Building Control Partnership

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Item for decision

Summary

This report invites the Committee to note the work that has commenced with a view to confirming that a partnership with up to two neighbouring councils would be viable, and if so, the development of a business case.

Recommendations

- (1) The Committee supports the exploration of the potential for a joint building control service for Epping Forest, Harlow and Uttlesford;
- (2) A project plan be prepared by officers to enable Improvement East funding to be drawn down.

Background Papers

1. The following papers were referred to by the author in the preparation of this report and are available for inspection from the author of the report.

None

Impact

- 2.

Communication/Consultation	Unison and staff in the Building Control service are regularly being kept informed, and consulted.
Community Safety	
Equalities	Equalities impacts will be assessed in exploring the potential for a partnership. The service includes the Projects Officer, who also has a key role in improving the Council's corporate performance against the Equality Standard for Local Government
Finance	Exploration of a partnership fits with one of the Strategic Solutions workstreams of the

	Medium Term Financial Strategy.
Health and Safety	
Human Rights/Legal Implications	
Sustainability	
Ward-specific impacts	
Workforce/Workplace	A partnership could result in staff being transferred to a new employer under TUPE provisions and changes in their workplace.

Situation

3. The Building Control service in Uttlesford is well regarded for its quality and customer service. However, economic conditions over the past two years have resulted in a reduction of workload and fee income. The service has taken some steps to cut its costs, but its building control activities are not breaking even, which is a statutory requirement. Budget provision has been made in 2010/11 for a shortfall of £77,000 between the costs of the service and estimated income from fees, excluding overheads. The service is facing intensified competition from approved inspectors working in the private sector.
4. Shared service arrangements offer the potential of pooling income and reduced overheads. Some useful arrangements are already in operation with the Council providing a dangerous structures service to Harlow Council, with plans also to deploy the Projects Officer to advise Harlow Council on access issues. More radical proposals will, though, be required to address the budget shortfall issue.
5. The relevant heads of service from this Council, Epping Forest and Harlow have started to explore the potential for a joint service covering the three local authority areas. Initial comparison of budgets suggests that there is potential for a joint service to be viable. The heads of service have agreed formally to exchange budget information for in depth examination by their respective finance officers. A joint visit to a similar partnership in the Norwich area will have taken place by the date of the committee meeting.
6. Funding of up to £32,000 has been secured from Improvement East to resource the development of a partnership. This would be paid in stages as key milestones are achieved. A project plan will be developed following the meeting with the Norfolk partnership.

Risk Analysis

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Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigating actions
Costs are incurred in exploring a joint service partnership that ultimately is not formed	1 Improvement East funding is available to meet these costs	2 Some capacity exists within the potential partner authorities to progress exploratory work	Develop a project plan with key milestones to enable IE funding to be drawn down.
Partnership proves to be not viable	2 Initial appraisal of budget information suggests partnership potential exists	2 Building Control is one of the services in the Strategic Solutions workstream. The costs of the service are considerably less than Revenues and Benefits.	Detailed examination of the budgets of the three services. Robust business plan will be developed.
Political support from all three authorities does not exist when decisions need to be taken about forming a partnership	3 Experience with South Cambridgeshire	3 Potential may still exist for a service for two rather than three local authority areas	Engagement at Leader and Chief Executive level Business plan to assess scope for two authority model.

1 = Little or no risk or impact

2 = Some risk or impact – action may be necessary.

3 = Significant risk or impact – action required

4 = Near certainty of risk occurring, catastrophic effect or failure of project.