

## REVIEW OF DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT

<b>Head of Service:</b>	Viv Evans, Head of Planning
<b>Wards affected:</b>	(All Wards);
<b>Urgent Decision?(yes/no)</b>	No
<b>If yes, reason urgent decision required:</b>	
<b>Appendices (attached):</b>	None

### Summary

The report seeks approval for additional resources required to undertake an independent review of the Council's development management service.

### Recommendation (s)

#### The Committee is asked to:

- (1) To agree to an independent review of the Development Management Service.
- (2) To approve the allocation of £14,500 to the Development Management Service budget to enable the review to be undertaken.

## 1 Reason for Recommendation

- 1.1 To seek approval for resources required to undertake an independent review of the Council's development management service. There has been a short-term capacity issue in the service over recent months due to a number of staff either moving on or retiring and this has revealed a number of areas where the Council's processes and systems would benefit from an independent review. The review will also correspond with commencement of a new Head of Service and outcomes will inform priorities for service improvement overseen by this post holder.

## 2 Background

# Strategy and Resources Committee

## 27 July 2021

### **Development Management**

- 2.1 The development management service for the Borough deals with all applications for planning permission, advertisement consent, listed building and conservation area consent, the felling of trees protected by tree preservation orders and prior notifications for telecommunication masts, and changes of use under the permitted development regime and the enforcement of breaches of planning control. It is a statutory function operating under primary and secondary legislation and guided by government guidance, case law and the locally adopted statutory Development Plan.
- 2.2 The Council's current Local Plan comprises the Core Strategy 2007, Plan E 2011, and the Development Management Policies document 2015. Together with the Surrey Minerals and Waste Plans, these make up the statutory Development Plan for the Borough.
- 2.3 It is one of the key public-facing services provided by the Borough Council.

### **Existing resources in Development Management**

- 2.4 There has been a short-term capacity issue in the service over recent months due to a number of staff either moving on or retiring. In addition, there have been a number of overturns of officer recommendations at committee which has resulted in planning appeals with associated resource requirements.
- 2.5 Whilst interim cover has been provided to cover the vacancies, the time taken to recruit has resulted in a backlog of applications building up which the service is currently working hard to reduce.

### **Previous review**

- 2.6 In 2017 the Planning Advisory Service (PAS) undertook a review of the development management service including the operation of the Planning Committee as a result of designation by central government. While a number of service improvements were implemented following this review, the past year has brought challenges for all Council services due to the Coronavirus pandemic which has required different ways of working and the delivery of services in different ways. This, coupled with the continuing changes/proposals to the planning system announced by central Government in the past year, has been significant.

### **Time for a fresh review**

- 2.7 It has been four years since the last review and it is considered that the time is right for a fresh independent review of the development management process from pre application through to the operation of the Planning Committee.

# Strategy and Resources Committee

## 27 July 2021

- 2.8 In discussion with the Planning Officers Society (POS), the scope of the review has been agreed and will focus on operational issues - processes/systems including the committee process and supporting processes external to the planning service such as ICT and legal.
- 2.9 It is intended that the review will take place in the Autumn of 2021, when increased capacity in the team to reduce the backlog has been completed and when it is anticipated permanent staff have been appointed.
- 2.10 The outcome of the independent review is likely to result in a number of recommendations for changes to be implemented and a plan for action. These will be reported to Planning Committee, but should future funding be required for implementation, this will come back to Strategy and Resources Committee for consideration.

### 3 Financial Implications

- 3.1 This report requests additional resources of £14,500 to be made available to the development management service to review can be undertaken. The budget requirement can be funded from existing corporate contingency budgets.
- 3.2 **Section 151 Officer's comments:** None arising from the contents of this report.

### 4 Legal Implications

- 4.1 None arising from the contents of this report.
- 4.2 **Monitoring Officer's comments:** None arising from the contents of this report.

### 5 Policies, Plans & Partnerships

- 5.1 **Council's Key Priorities:** The following Key Priorities are engaged:  
  
The development management service will contribute towards delivering the Council's Visions and objectives identified in its Four Year Plan.
- 5.2 **Service Plans:**  
  
Development Management is a matter included within the current Service Delivery Plan.
- 5.3 **Climate & Environmental Impact of recommendations:**  
  
The development management service itself has a key role in implementing a number of key objectives that are set out in our Climate Change Action Plan.

# Strategy and Resources Committee

## 27 July 2021

### 5.4 **Sustainability Policy & Community Safety Implications:**

The development management service has a key role in implementing a number of key Sustainability objectives. In order to comply with Government safety guidance due to COVID-19, consultation procedures are being reviewed. Consultation procedures are outlined in a separate document, the Statement of Community Involvement. The Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) was published in 14 November 2019. A further report was taken to the 10 September 2020 Licencing and Planning Policy Committee meeting seeking approval of an Addendum to the SCI in the context of the Coronavirus pandemic. The Addendum was approved for the purpose of public consultation. The public consultation on the Addendum has not yet been undertaken.

## **6 Appendices**

6.1 None