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## ***Meeting of the Sustainability Committee***

# **Promotion of Sustainable construction methods and the implications for Building Control staffing levels.**

## **Purpose of Report**

Assessment of the level of staffing within Building Control to cope with:

- a) the increase in workload due to volume and legislative change,
- b) the aspirational requirements of City of York Council with regard to supervision of sustainable construction.

## **Background**

Since 1985 the Building Control Section has been in competition for its service. Initially this competition was in the housing market, but with the advent of Approved Inspectors over the last eight years, this now includes commercial and small domestic (extensions, loft conversions etc.) work. The threat of Approved Inspectors with regard to Building Control and the Council as a whole has been identified at a previous Scrutiny Committee review of Building Control.

If CYC Building Control fails to maintain its current market share (90%) as a result of not being able to achieve performance indicators, then this will lead to an increase in the amount of Approved Inspector schemes taking place with the City. If Approved Inspectors take a greater market share, then CYC's presence on construction sites within the city will diminish. This potential situation was of considerable concern to the Scrutiny Committee, as it recognised that in many instances Building Control was the "eyes and ears" of CYC. It also recognised that Building Control is the first point of contact for customers, developers and the public for a wide range of council departments, as well as being a major income generator.

## **Present Working**

At present CYC Building Control is a highly motivated focused team, who have high expectations with regard to service delivery, of themselves, their team and the achievement of the Council's goals.

The number of Performance Indicators that now form the basis of the District Surveyors Association's (DSA) performance standards, are such that only a well-motivated Building Control Team can provide the required service delivery to customers both internal and external.

Building Control Section has achieved a service delivery above those targets indicated within its customer contract. This achievement is against a background that has seen workload increase by 30% over the last 3 years. Changes in April 2002 and January 2005 have brought replacement double-glazing and electrical installations within the scope of the Building Regulations. This requires Building Control to check new installations for compliance. Although an independent accreditation scheme is in place it is anticipated that CYC Building Control will have to inspect 35% of the total market for double-glazing and up to 20% for electrical installations. It is also anticipated that conservatories (currently exempt work) will be brought under the scope of the Building Regulations in the near future. This will inevitably lead to an increase in both workload and income.

The DSA produce a nationally accepted and adopted standard procedure for assessing the numbers of Building Control surveyors /Admin required to carry out a Local Authority's Building Control function. If this procedure were to be applied to CYC, it indicates that 14 Building Control surveyors and 4 Admin Officers would be required given the amount and complexity of the work that is undertaken. Whilst it can be argued that these numbers are arbitrary, it does indicate a massive difference when compared to the current establishment – 7 Building Control surveyors and 2 Admin.

### **Promotion and inspection of Sustainable construction.**

City of York Council has clear aspirations to promote the use of sustainable materials and construction practices within the local authority. Building control has clearly a key role to play in this and it is a role it is keen to undertake.

To engage in such a role there are important issues to be considered:

- The promotion of sustainable methods will require training for the staff.
- Once trained the knowledge will need to be conveyed to our customers either by seminar or by printed material.
- There will need to be an enhanced site presence, as some inspections relating to sustainable methods of construction will not be covered by statutory inspections that are currently being carried out.
- The supervision of sites not subject to City of York Building Control site visits (Approved Inspector/NHBC supervised projects) and who promotes the sustainability issues at design stage on these projects must be addressed.
- Staffing and resources.

### **Staffing level requirements.**

Building Control is currently working at 100% capacity. In addition to this, staff are working overtime where necessary, consultants and temporary staff are brought in as required to cover peaks in workflow or if staff are on leave. For Building Control to take on any additional duties then additional staff and resources will have to be provided from outside of the current Building Control budget.

It is considered that 2 additional surveyors and 1 additional administration officer would enable the Building Control Section to meet not only its currently increasing workload requirements, but also workload generated by an input in to sustainable development and construction issues. (Construction methods, materials etc plus the development of literature both hard copy and online, through the Building Control web site.

The implications of the implementation of [Easy@York](#) are as yet unclear, and although the use of a one- stop shop and call handling centre will reduce the considerable number of phone calls the section receives it will not reduce the other back office work that the sections admin staff carry out.

To conclude Building Control is actively in favour of promoting the use of sustainable materials and construction methods, it will, however, require assistance to carry out such promotion

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