

Planning Committee

2.00pm, Wednesday, 11 August 2021

Development management discretionary charges update

Executive/routine	
Wards	All
Council Commitments	13 , 14 , 50

1. Recommendations

- 1.1 It is recommended that the Committee notes:
 - 1.1.1 That the changes to the Council's non-material variation service which were agreed on 3 February 2021 were implemented on 1 April 2021;
 - 1.1.2 The update provided on application numbers and income from 1 April 2021 – 21 June 2021; and
 - 1.1.3 That an update on the changes will be brought to a future meeting of the Planning Committee once sufficient data has been collected on performance.

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Development management discretionary charges update

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 This report updates the Planning Committee on the refreshed non-material variation application (NMVA) service introduced by the Council on 1 April 2021. The NMVA process is functioning smoothly with 49 variation requests received as at 21 June 2021, representing £7,788 of income from the newly introduced charges. A quality assurance regime is being put in place to assess the quality of service being provided to customers.

3. Background

- 3.1 A non-material variation refers to changes to an existing planning permission that is deemed by the authority to be non-material in nature. These non-material variations do not significantly change a scheme that was originally granted planning permission and are therefore by definition minor changes.
- 3.2 The cost of processing and assessing non-material variation requests made to the Planning service is estimated to be around £71,712 per annum. Until April 2021, the Planning service has provided this service free of charge.
- 3.3 Council officers developed proposals to improve the non-material variation service, as well as to make it financially sustainable by introducing charging on a cost recovery basis. These proposals were approved by the Planning Committee on [3 February 2021](#) and enacted on 1 April 2021.

4. Main report

- 4.1 The changes to the non-material variation request process were implemented on 1 April 2021 and the amended service has now been in operation for several months. As of 20 June 2021, the Council has received 49 valid requests for non-material variations, broken down as follows:
- 18 householder non-material variation requests;
 - 21 local non-material variation requests; and

- 10 major application non-material variation requests.
- 4.2 The rate of NMVAs received over this relatively short period currently appears to be comparatively lower than the figures gathered for the period November 2019 to November 2020 for householder and major developments. It is considered to be too early to draw conclusions from this reduction in numbers, given the relatively short period that the system has been in place. Further assessment of the number and category of requests received will be undertaken prior to further reporting.
- 4.3 The delivery of the amended non-material variation service has gone relatively smoothly to date. Officers and support staff have adapted quickly to the new systems. Both the provision of the service itself and the supporting activities (such as taking payment) are working well. The introduction of a single application form through which applicants can request a non-material variation is providing a more consistent approach for customers and staff resources are being managed within the Planning service to deliver this effectively.
- 4.4 The key driver of the changes to the non-material variation request process is improving customer service. To help the project board monitor if this goal has been realised, they are implementing proposals for quality assurance, with the following being undertaken:
- 4.4.1 Customer feedback – capturing the views of customers via mechanisms such as Customer Forum sessions;
 - 4.4.2 Officer feedback – capturing the views of planning officer and support staff to inform ongoing procedures; and
 - 4.4.3 Key performance indicators – ongoing review of incoming fees and statistical data on the service provided.

5. Next Steps

- 5.1 The Council will continue to deliver the NMVA service.
- 5.2 Work is ongoing to further improve the NMVA service, for example by enhancing staff procedural manuals. Going forward, the number of applications and income received will continue to be monitored to assess if projections are met and to ensure that the fees are proportionate to the costs to the Council. Committee will be updated on progress sufficient data has been collected on performance.
- 5.3 Any future proposals to alter the charging regime will be subject of a separate report.

6. Financial impact

- 6.1 The charges set out for the introduction of the NMVA service have been calculated on the basis that these will substantially cover the costs to the Planning Service for this work. It is reasonable to anticipate that the introduction of charging may deter some applicants from seeking a non-material variation who would otherwise have

done so. This would result in reduced revenue costs to the Council of delivering a non-material variation service.

- 6.2 Based on the volume and mix of NMVAs received over the period November 2019 to November 2020, and assuming a 25% reduction of applications due to the factors noted above, full cost recovery would be expected to generate approximately £54,000 for the period April 2021 to March 2022.
- 6.3 Between 1 April 2021 and 21 June 2021, the total income collected from charges for the NMVA service was £7,788. As noted, the number of applications received has been lower than the projected three month period used to estimate projected case numbers and the resultant fee income is therefore currently proportionally less than the figures projected above. However, given that the process has only been underway for a relatively short period of time (approximately three months) it is reasonable to expect that there may be some fluctuations in income across the year. More meaningful assessment of the volume and type of non-material variation requests received will be possible in due course when the process has been running for a longer period of time.
- 6.4 As agreed by Planning Committee, charges for non-material variation requests are being waived for any developments primarily concerning works relating to accessibility for people with disabilities. As yet, no cases have been received in this category.

7. Stakeholder/Community Impact

- 7.1 As set out above, the Council is enacting a quality assurance regime to enable it to monitor the quality of service being provided to customers. The ongoing delivery of the NMVA service will be included in this regime.
- 7.2 The changes to the NMVA service will continue to be discussed at Customer Forum sessions.

8. Background reading/external references

- 8.1 Development Management Discretionary Charges report, Planning Committee on [3 February 2021](#).

9. Appendices

- 9.1 None.