

ENVIRONMENT CABINET MEMBER MEETING

Agenda Item 77

Brighton & Hove City Council

Subject:	Replacement of Brighton & Hove Sustainability Checklist		
Date of Meeting:	23 December 2010		
Report of:	Strategic Director, Place		
Contact Officer:	Name:	Paula Goncalves	Tel: 29-2352
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Key Decision:	No		
Wards Affected:	All		

FOR GENERAL RELEASE

1. SUMMARY AND POLICY CONTEXT:

- 1.1 The report seeks approval to make changes to the council's online sustainability checklist. Completion of the checklist is a council requirement for all who submit residential planning applications. The checklist is part of the council's Sustainable Building Design Supplementary Planning Document (SPD 08) and is an important component in its objectives of securing more sustainable residential development. The proposed changes will make the checklist more user-friendly for planning applicants and will improve the quality of the data that is used for monitoring purposes. The new checklist will be hosted in-house by the council, replacing the existing version that is outsourced to an external company. This will save money and make it easier to undertake future refinements and improvements to the system.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That the Cabinet Member endorses the replacement of the currently outsourced Sustainability Checklist with a new in-house version hosted by the council's ICT services.
- 2.2 That the Cabinet Member agrees the timetable of production, testing, and implementation of the new in-house Sustainability Checklist by 1 April 2011.
- 2.3 That approval be given for the in-house version of the Brighton & Hove Sustainability Checklist to be adopted, subject to any minor non-material alterations agreed by the Strategic Director of Place in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Environment.

3. RELEVANT BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 Brighton & Hove's Sustainability Checklist is an online tool, completion of which is a requirement for all who submit residential planning applications. The checklist has been up and running since 2008 and is important in:
- improving the sustainability credentials of new residential development;
 - raising awareness of sustainability policies and issues; and

- providing important data that is invaluable is assessing the performance of the council's sustainability policies (Local Plan Policy SU2 and accompanying Sustainable Building Design Supplementary Planning Document (SPD08)).
- 3.2 The effectiveness of the checklist as a planning tool is reflected in the fact that it won the Royal Town Planning Institute's Sustainable Communities category in the South East Regional Planning Awards in 2008.
- 3.3 At present, the checklist is hosted and managed outside the council by an IT company. This has incurred an annual fee of £3,400. The current service contract is due to end on 31 March 2011, thereby providing the following opportunities:
 - improvements to the checklist to make it more streamlined and user friendly;
 - an improved quality of data for monitoring purposes;
 - the ability to more easily and cheaply undertake troubleshooting and make future refinements and improvements to the system; and
 - a more cost-effective in-house option for the financial year 2011-2012 and beyond.
- 3.4 The more streamlined and user-friendly checklist will comprise a reduced number of questions, focussing on factors that are considered to be the most relevant for policy-monitoring, implementation and awareness-raising. The details are still in the process of being refined but it is likely that, depending on the scale and nature of the development proposal, the current maximum number of questions that an applicant will have to complete will reduce from 72 to 30.
- 3.5 A further benefit of the new checklist will be that applicants who submit a revised planning application (following an earlier refusal) will have the ability to resubmit their previous checklist, without having to complete a new one. This is not possible under the existing system.
- 3.6 The reason for preparing this report and seeking permission to amend the checklist is that any change to the checklist constitutes a change in kind to the adopted Sustainable Building Design Supplementary Planning Document (SPD 08) as approved at Environment CMM on the 5 June 2008. It should be noted, however, that any modifications to the checklist do not incur changes to the content of the SPD document itself.
- 3.7 The timetable for amending the checklist is set out below:

2010

October-December: content review and software preparation/consolidation

2011

January: call for volunteers for testing

February: testing and final adjustments

March: training sessions for local agents, members and officers

1 April 2011: new in-house checklist goes online

4. CONSULTATION

- 4.1 Building on the experience of the current checklist, there will be an opportunity for local agents, members and officers to test the new in-house version of the checklist. A targeted call for volunteers will be sent out in January 2011 to give an opportunity for some local agents, members and officers to test the tool and make suggestions as to how it could be improved.
- 4.2 Once the tool is finalised, a wider invitation will be sent to local agents, members and officers for a series of tailored training workshops prior to it going on general release.

5. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

Financial Implications:

- 5.1 Brighton and Hove's Sustainability Checklist currently costs £3,400 to produce. The costs of tool development, testing, training and implementation will be met from within existing revenue budgets, as the work will be undertaken by council staff.

Finance Officer consulted: Karen Brookshaw

Date: 08/11/10

Legal Implications:

- 5.2 The introduction of a new in-house checklist will not result in any change to planning policy. Neither, as stated in the body of the Report, will SPD08 Sustainable Building Design require any amendment to its text. Section 62 (3) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 allows local planning authorities to require certain evidence in support to be submitted with planning applications. Failure to comply will result in the application being declared invalid. One of the Council's requirements under s62(3) in respect of residential applications is the submission of a completed sustainability checklist, as noted in paragraph 3.1 of the Report.
- 5.3 It is not considered that any adverse human rights issues arise from the Report.

Lawyer consulted: Hilary Woodward

Date: 15/11/10

Equalities Implications:

- 5.4 The Sustainability Checklist is an online tool. It is more easily accessed by internet users. Provisions put in place to mitigate this problem. User support services put in place for the existing online checklist will continue to assist users who do not have access to a computer or the internet. These include telephone-based support service and printed copies posted upon request.

Sustainability Implications:

- 5.5 The tool represents the planning policies which focus on overall sustainability of applications: namely Local Plan policy SU2 and SPD08 Sustainable Building Design. These involve holistic standards for resource efficiency in materials,

water, energy and carbon reduction in order to deliver sustainable development through the planning system

Crime & Disorder Implications:

5.6 None identified.

Risk and Opportunity Management Implications:

5.7 None identified.

Corporate / Citywide Implications:

5.8 The Sustainability Checklist is a tool which can monitor what sustainability standards are being proposed at planning stage. Having this facility was unique at the time it was created in 2008, and as far as officers are aware, remains a unique tool in terms of its capacity to monitor these details. This is valuable both for Brighton & Hove, but also as a tool to assess the success of planning policies for sustainability more widely.

6. EVALUATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTION(S):

6.1 The alternative to developing an in-house checklist is the 'do nothing' option. That is, to secure £3,400 per year to keep the current checklist in place. This option was considered less cost-effective than developing an in-house version.

7. REASONS FOR REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 To ensure there is detailed, up to date, clear advice to all those with an interest in the development process on relevant sustainable design policies.

7.2 To deliver more effective implementation of sustainable building policies and improved monitoring.

7.3 To enable the local planning authority to prepare for implementation of the new checklist and local planning applicants/agents, members and officers to familiarise themselves with its contents and functionality.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendices:

None

Documents in Members' Rooms:

None

Background Documents

1. Local Plan Policy SU2
2. SPD08 Sustainable Building Design
3. Environment CMM report 5 June 2008

