

REPORT TO PENNINE LANCS BUILDING CONTROL



DATE	20 th January 2022
PORTFOLIO	Pennine Lancashire Building Control
REPORT AUTHOR	Helen Holland
TEL NO	01254 595672
EMAIL	helen.holland@blackburn.gov.uk

Future Options for the Pennine Lancashire Building Control Service

PURPOSE

1. To consider options for future delivery of the service via Blackburn with Darwen Council and Burnley Council working separately, but assisting each other where necessary.

RECOMMENDATION

2. That the Joint Committee agrees to progress joint withdrawal from the agreement, with details of exit arrangements to be agreed by each authority.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION

3. To allow for the Blackburn with Darwen and Burnley Building Control sub-teams to be better integrated within their wider respective departments at each authority. This will enable more effective local decisions to be taken regarding new back-office systems, procedures and resourcing whilst continuing to collaborate and support each other when necessary.

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

4. The Pennine Lancashire Building Control (PLBC) agreement was set up in 2009, and established a single shared service for the delivery of statutory Building Control functions, with an integrated strategy and ICT solution.
5. As the service has evolved over the years, a number of issues have arisen, with key issues identified as follows, some of which are long-standing and some which are new:
 - The service is a statutory service which operates in a competitive market amongst approved inspectors;
 - Recruitment and retention of building surveyors has been extremely challenging due to competition from approved inspectors and increasing expectations, causing a shortage of resources within the team and added pressure on individuals;
 - The post-Grenfell Building Safety Bill anticipates more responsibility and accountability for Building Control professionals and authorities;

- Despite being a joint service, the team operates as two distinct sub-teams at two separate locations with two separate websites which combine to limit the scope for greater service integration and resource utilisation; and
 - Whilst the digitisation of procedures is underway, there are significant process inefficiencies and differing operating systems within the two office bases.
6. For the reasons set out above, along with the potential to improve team integration for the Building Control teams within their respective authorities, the recommendation is to progress joint withdrawal from the PLBC agreement. Subject to the approval of the joint committee, formal withdrawal notices will be taken to the relevant decision-making meetings of each Council for approval with further work undertaken to finalise agreed exit arrangements and timescales.
 7. The alternative option, to work towards addressing the above issues, would be to reconfigure and restructure the service. This would involve ensuring that the service is truly joined, by operating from a single office base, creating a single web presence and working as one team under one set of procedures. This option would however still result in the Building Control teams being disconnected from their wider Council teams, and therefore has not been recommended to members.
 8. Officers from both teams have worked positively to develop the current arrangements but it is clear that the priorities and operational needs of each Council could be better served by re-integrating each Building Control team within their respective growth and development services.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS AND BUDGET PROVISION

9. Any exit arrangements will be subject to agreement of financial implications, including division of remaining reserves, debts and staff TUPE transfers.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

10. Should the recommendation be approved, and exit agreed formally by each Local Authority, the formal PLBC agreement, constitution and service level agreements would terminate.

DETAILS OF CONSULTATION

11. Paul Gattrell – Head of Housing and Development - Burnley Borough Council
 Martin Kelly – Strategic Director for Place - Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council
 Simon Jones – Growth Director – Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council

BACKGROUND PAPERS

12. None.

FURTHER INFORMATION

PLEASE CONTACT: Helen Holland 01254 585672