



STAFF REPORT

TO: Environment & Planning Subcommittee

FROM: Jean Hodson- Manager Consents

REFERENCE: T202

SUBJECT: **BUILDING CONSENT AUTHORITY ACCREDITATION PROCESS UPDATE- REPORT EP06/08/07** - Report Prepared for 2 August 2006 Meeting

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

To update the Committee on the accreditation process, timelines and issues facing the Council in relation to achieving accreditation as a "Building Consent Authority". Through the Department Manager's reports the Committee has been made aware of the work being undertaken in order to achieve accreditation by November 2007. This stems from the requirements of the Building Act 2004. This report provides more detail and raises issues facing staff which have become apparent as time has gone by.

2. BACKGROUND

Tasman District Council has joined a consortium of twelve "Top of the South" Councils operating under the name "Mainland Building Consent Authority Group" (MBCAG). The group includes; Ashburton, Buller, Christchurch, Grey, Hurunui, Kaikoura, Marlborough, Nelson, Selwyn, Waimakariri and Westland.

A memorandum of understanding has been developed with the aim to develop a regional approach to implementing the Building Act 2004 in its entirety, developing and implementing common processes, procedures and standards for building control services which will achieve the required standard in order to gain accreditation. A positive and co-operative culture exists within the group with the work anticipated to extend to considering structures and processes for delivery of building control services over the next five to ten years.

Meetings take place in Christchurch and the group is facilitated by Christchurch staff and a consultant – Karen Holland (from Schema Consultants Ltd) undertakes a project management function on behalf of the consortium. Karen has recently been asked to perform a similar role for a consortium of the rest of the South Island Councils. Other similar consortiums have been formed throughout the North Island. It is understood that the Mainland BCAG is regarded as being ahead of many of the other groups, which is good for us.

The Mainland BCAG has successfully applied for and received funding from the Department of Building and Housing (\$25,000) which will go towards the costs of the consultant's work.

Members of the MGCAG have been working in sub-groups, each one having tasks such as developing various common application forms, check sheets for inspections and plan processing, certificates, protocols, contracts etc. The benefit of the sub-groups is that the work can be shared and not every Council has to “re-invent the wheel.” The framework is provided by the need to create a “Procedure Manual” and probably a “Quality Manual.”

3. TIMELINE FOR ACCREDITATION

The timeline for the Accreditation Project is attached (dated 5 May 2006.)

As stated earlier, the date by which Councils must be accredited in order to maintain their powers and functions under the Building Act 2004 is **November 2007**. The Department of Building and Housing (DBH) will use an independent auditing agency (IANZ) to undertake the assessment and accreditation process. Eight-four local authorities need to go through this process. It is a tight timeframe DBH has set and it is understood registration will be in place shortly to allow applications to be lodged from January 2007.

4. DEPARTMENTAL ISSUES

The modified agreed processes and procedures will have to be implemented within the Building Control section (and other areas of Council e.g Planning, Engineering, Records and Customer Services) well before the deadline in November in order for us to achieve accreditation. The work that this process represents has and will continue to place a significant additional burden on staff, which is compounded by the additional work involved in training the Customer Service Officers on Building activity aspects and coping with the additional work associated with the improved processes (inspection and plan checking). To spell this out clearly, before the changes to the Building Act, a building consent application for a standard house might consist of four or five sheets of plans, now we typically receive 12-15 pages with complex details and calculations which all need careful checking. The time this takes has at least doubled. The number of inspections for a standard house has also doubled, from around six to 12 or often more. The impact of this is that staff are working longer hours than they should be in order to satisfy the “customer demand” for inspections and other consent outputs and there has been a steady decline in our ability to meet our statutory timeframes for consent processing. We are trading on the good will of staff and in my view this is not sustainable in the long term. We are under resourced in the area of inspection, plan processing and administration. This is a difficult fact to deal with in the light of the budgetary restraints facing Council in all areas.

5. ORGANISATIONAL ISSUES

The changes to processes that will have to be made in order for us to achieve accreditation will impact on other sections of the Council such as Customer Services, Engineering, Planning and Records Management. Discussions are unfolding as the changes are recognised and no doubt there will be issues for other areas.

We face having to improve our inputs into the PIM / Building Consent processes such as providing more detailed information and meeting statutory timeframes will require improved document management systems (electronic scanning and file management). It is expected that detailed "service level" agreements will have to be developed between departments to meet the accreditation requirements. None of this is of our making but we will have to meet the mark!

6. RESOURCE NEEDS

It was estimated that the impact of the new requirements associated with the 2004 amendments would be a 40% increase in the cost of building consent processes. This resulted in Council increasing our fees by this margin in the 2004 / 2005 year. A review of the fee structure is required as clearly the current level of fees is not covering the costs of the activity. We are investigating systems for charging for additional inspections where the need is created through non-compliance with approved plans or other faults of the builders. A report on the fee structure will be brought to the Committee in the near future.

It is difficult to estimate the cost of improving Council's document management systems but this is being addressed by the "Electronic Document and Records Management System" project being undertaken by Corporate Services. However, it is hoped that the needs of the Building Control Section for urgent action in this area will prove to be a significant "driver" for this project.

7. IMPLICATIONS FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT

We are but one of 84 other local authorities being challenged in this way. This whole sector of local government is under significant pressure, clearly both in the short and the long term, due to the demands of the Department of Building and Housing associated with not only the requirements of the BA 2004 but also with various concurrent reviews (Building Code, various Standards etc). There are also more changes proposed by the DBH which will impact on us in the next three - six years. The extent of the impact is difficult to gauge but it is becoming apparent the demands are having a significant adverse effect on local government's building services functions which is bound to have serious economic and industry wide implications.

8. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Committee receives this report.

Jean Hodson
Manager Consents

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Mainland BCA Accreditation Project (5 May 2006)



