

Planning Process Review - Update

SUMMARY

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to allow the Board to receive an update on how the Development Control team and partners are progressing with process review and service improvement. The supporting information outlines a few key areas and the presentation at the meeting will address new processes which are also outlined on the appended flow charts.

RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 To note and discuss the merits of recent ideas and improvements and to make appropriate comments or recommendations.

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION

- 3.1 To ensure that Planning, Housing and Leisure Board are kept informed of the position regarding the on-going process review.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Managing applications

- 4.1 The number of professional Planning Officers in the Development Control team has reduced over recent years as a result of successive restructures. In total, the Planning Officer team comprises 6 FTE. In 2008 this was 12 FTE.
- 4.2 Currently the Planning Officer team comprises the DC Team Leader, who handles management responsibilities together with major application casework. The DC works 4 days a week. There are three senior officers and they combine major application casework with other responsibilities. The working hours of the three officers account to 2.6 FTE. There are also 2.6 FTE planning officers. Whilst the planning officers should deal primarily with smaller scale applications, they handle major application casework to assist with balancing the overall load and to provide those individuals with on-going professional development and experience. The team

is engaged in a range of complex projects and their individual caseloads are all high.

- 4.3 The current caseload average is 55 'on-hand' applications per officer and in 2012/13 the average annual output per officer was 176 applications. The county-wide picture is somewhat different and in 2012/13 the 'on-hand' average was 27 cases and the annual average output was 135 applications per officer.
- 4.4 Planning Assistants also handle casework items to assist the Planning Officers. The applications they deal with include prior notifications and certificates of lawfulness that carry a workload burden but often don't require the professional judgement required for assessing planning applications. This has been introduced in the recent past to assist with high caseloads and to create a flexible team working ethos. The Planning Assistants Team Leader handles applications for works to protected trees and works to trees in conservation areas in addition to other managerial duties. In 2012/13 that individual dealt with 183 applications and his current 'on-hand' caseload is 44 applications. The applications for tree work historically had input from a specialist team of Arborists but those internal consultation arrangements no longer exist. The current post holder is, therefore, required to be conversant with up-to-date practises and guidance. This is another example of flexible working and responding to the changing circumstances of the service.
- 4.5 In terms of the management of applications and the maximisation of resources the appended flow charts demonstrate how we are attempting to re-engineer processes. The flow charts formed the basis of a process mapping event on 10 May, involving a range of colleagues, and will be expanded on at your meeting to explain the roles involved and the importance of our back-office database and new Opentext web facility.

Customer contact

- 4.6 A duty system is provided for customers in the Customer service Centre. Currently this is in the form of 4 individual 3 hour sessions that are hosted in the customer service area and booked using our electronic appointment system. The service no longer provides a drop-in facility for customers. At the first point of contact customers are sign-posted to all other forms of guidance to assist them with self-service and, if an appointment is required, they are asked to provide up-front information to enable the meeting to be as focused as possible. The meetings are a maximum of 20 minutes. A rota system is managed by the team to cover the appointments and one person covers each 3 hour session. The Planning Officers, Planning Assistants and Technicians share the responsibility. We constantly evaluate how the system is managed using feedback from colleagues and customers. Recently we have reduced the service from 6 individual 3 hour sessions but have extended the service to cover 4 days (mornings on Monday – Thursday).
- 4.7 A balance has to be struck between the demands of this system as a free service and its impact on the delivery of fee generating applications, which are monitored by

performance targets and are the main focus of the team.

- 4.8 The appointment system is coupled with a 'team phone' which is also managed by the team. This system is quite an intensive responsibility and we have devised a system for use on the corporate telephony facility to guide customers to other self-service opportunities. This should be in place in the next few weeks. The team phone is live throughout the working week and is another free service.
- 4.9 The appointment system is distinct from our fee based pre-application service. This is aimed at major development proposals and providing written responses and / or meetings to flexibly meet the needs of the individual developers. As part of our Development Management ethos we attempt to provide co-ordinated and comprehensive advice using all consultees and partners.

Advertising applications

- 4.10 A statutory component of the application process is the need to advertise certain applications in the local press (we use the Derby Telegraph as it is the only newspaper with city-wide coverage). For example, major applications, waste applications and works to listed buildings are subject to press advertisements. As part of an on-going assessment of this responsibility a new format to the standard advertisement template has been designed to minimise the word content and to combine proposals under a single advertisement where there are multiple advertisements. An initial assessment indicates that savings could be in the region of £50 for a single advertisement and this saving will be greater for those multiple advertisements. Those savings will be carefully monitored.

Committee reports

- 4.11 The regulatory nature of the service means that certain applications are reported for decision to the Planning Control Committee. The terms of reference for the committee are outlined in the constitution and approximately 10% of all applications are reported. The content and precision of committee reports is crucial as reports are scrutinised by a range of interested parties. A revision to the format of the committee report was recently agreed with the cross-party Member Review Panel which comprises the Chair, Councillor Sara Bolton, and Councillors Robin Wood and Mike Carr. The revision to the format was agreed to minimise duplication within the report and to maximise the time of the individual report writing officers. The new format is being introduced at the meeting on 25 July. It is difficult to quantify the time / resource saving with this exercise but is another component of on-going process improvement.

Decision notices

- 4.12 The dispatch of decision notices has historically been through the post. With on-going IT improvements and the predominance of e-mail for applicants / agents approximately 90% of all notices are now dispatched electronically. This provides an improved service to customers who receive the notices on the day the decisions are

made and savings on paper and postage.

- 4.13 The electronic delivery of information has been part of the format of the application process for some time and in 2010 we introduced the electronic dispatch of consultations to the relevant consultees. This has increased the speed of the service in that respect and reduced the need to print and post supporting application documents.

Planning enforcement

- 4.14 Planning enforcement deals with the unauthorised development of land and buildings, the breach of advertisement control and all other breaches under the Planning and associated Acts. It underpins the statutory function of Development Control and has to be applied proportionately. The essence of an effective enforcement service is to resolve disputes, where applicable, by negotiation and to reserve the formal courses action to the most demanding cases, where expedient to do so.
- 4.15 The service has been reduced by 50% since 2011 as part of our on-going restructure and this has placed an obvious burden on the remaining officer. In December 2012 a report was presented to Planning Control Committee to agree a system of work prioritisation but resource issues dictate that even this is proving difficult to deliver. The Planning Control Committee is also presented with updates on enforcement issues and the scope and progress of enforcement proceedings.
- 4.16 Currently our single Enforcement officer handles around 118 live cases and this far exceeds the county-wide average of 43 cases per officer.

Efficiency and Value

- 4.17 In 2011 a cost recovery exercise was carried out nationally in an attempt to determine the overall cost of delivering planning services. This was handled by the Planning Advisory Service and CIPFA and was designed to provide the evidence base for planning application fees to be levied locally and reflect the true cost of service delivery. The exercise was an intensive programme of recording hours associated with all parts of the planning application process and factoring all the associated on-costs borne by the Council. Officers from across the Council were involved in the process and the Head of Development Control was instrumental in arranging a sub-regional group of officers from various other authorities to look at the exercise in some detail.
- 4.18 The output of the exercise indicated that our service was the cheapest to run in its comparator group of authorities (included 18 others). In terms of costs per hour we were 17.75% cheaper than the average and, in real terms, the highest cost per hour in the comparator group was £17 greater than our service. The exercise also indicated that we had a greater proportion of recoverable costs than the group average (11% more).

- 4.19 The exercise was a robust assessment to inform the government's cost recovery programme which has not been introduced and fees for planning applications continue to be levied centrally.

OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 5.1 None.

This report has been approved by the following officers:

Legal officer Financial officer Human Resources officer Estates/Property officer Service Director(s) Other(s)	Paul Clarke, Head of Planning
For more information contact: Background papers: List of appendices:	Clare Harrison 01332 643648 clare.harrison@derby.gov.uk Appendix 1 – Implications Appendix 2 – Flow Charts

IMPLICATIONS

Financial and Value for Money

- 1.1 None arising directly from this report.

Legal

- 2.1 Section 21 (3) of the Local Government Act 2000 requires that the power of an overview and scrutiny committee to review or scrutinise a decision made but not implemented includes power to recommend that the decision be reconsidered by the person who made it.

Personnel

- 3.1 None arising directly from this report.

Equalities Impact

- 4.1 Effective scrutiny benefits all Derby people.

Health and Safety

- 5.1 None arising directly from this report.

Environmental Sustainability

- 6.1 None arising directly from this report.

Property and Asset Management

- 7.1 None arising directly from this report.

Risk Management

- 8.1 None arising directly from this report.

Corporate objectives and priorities for change

- 9.1 The information set out in this report supports the corporate priorities to ensure the

people in Derby will enjoy good quality services that meet local needs and being safe and feeling safe.