

<b>COMMITTEE:</b>	<b>CABINET</b>		
<b>DATE:</b>	<b>13 FEBRUARY 2003</b>		
<b>SUBJECT:</b>	<b>PLANNING PERFORMANCE</b>		
<b>REPORT OF:</b>	<b>DIRECTOR OF PLANNING, REGENERATION &amp; AMENITIES</b>		
<b>Ward(s):</b>	All		
<b>Purpose:</b>	To consider a detailed report on the reasons why the time taken to determine planning applications has increased during this year.		
<b>Contact:</b>	Tim Cookson, Head of Planning, Tel: 01323 415249 or internally extension 5249.		
<b>Recommendations:</b>	<p>1) That the report is noted and the staffing difficulties in the Development Control, Planning Support Services and Legal Services are acknowledged.</p> <p>2) That an action plan is put in place to enable the Council to achieve targets based on previous volumes of work.</p> <p>3) That the growth bid for 1.5FTE Senior Planning Officer staff in the Planning Division for 2003/04 is noted.</p> <p>4) That the recent appointments in the Legal Division will bring staff levels up to establishment by the end of February 2003 and thus help reduce backlogs in Section 106 agreements.</p>		
<b>1.0</b>	<b><u>Background</u></b>		

1.1	The Cabinet, at its meeting on 5 December 2002, considered a report of the Chief Executive presenting performance monitoring information for the second quarter of the year. It was resolved that a further report be made to the next meeting of the Cabinet in respect of the time taken to complete planning applications.							
1.2	Members should refer to the appendix to Chief Executive's report to Cabinet on 5 December entitled Performance Monitoring for the latest performance statistics.							
<b>2.0</b>	<b><u>Introduction</u></b>							
2.1	There has been a marked slow down in the speed of determining planning applications. The number of planning and related applications has risen from 626 in 1999 to 800 in 2002 an increase of 28%. Between 2001 and 2002 there has been an increase of 9% alone. In addition there has been an increase in the workload in development control generally as a result of inquiries by the public, solicitors and developers. In response to enquiries about 1920 non-standard letters were written last year which compares with 820 written in 1998 an increase of 134%.							
2.2	Fee income has risen significantly in the last four years as follows:							
	<b>Fee Income (£'000)</b>	<b>1998-1999</b>	<b>1999-2000</b>	<b>2000-01</b>	<b>2001-02</b>	<b>2002-03</b>		
		156	173.8	181.55	189.5	250.2		
	Budget	187	215	265.7	228.7	250.2		
	Actual							
2.3.	The following table shows the comparative performance of East Sussex authorities:							
	<b>Time Period</b>	<b>July – Sept 2002</b>	<b>July – Sept 2002</b>	<b>July – Sept 2002</b>	<b>Year ending 30 Sept 02</b>	<b>Year ending 30 Sept 02</b>		
	<b>Measure</b>	<b>Major - % Determined in 13 weeks</b>	<b>Minor - % Determined in 8 weeks</b>	<b>Other - % Determined in 8 weeks</b>	<b>All - % Determined in 8 weeks</b>	<b>% Delegated decisions</b>		

	<b>Eastbourne</b>	33%	51%	58%	64%	71%		
	<b>Hastings</b>	100%	69%	80%	80%	87%		
	<b>Lewes</b>	64%	67%	84%	76%	84%		
	<b>Rother</b>	38%	37%	56%	51%	80%		
	<b>Wealden</b>	89%	51%	71%	66%	89%		
	<b>Brighton &amp; Hove</b>	31%	34%	50%	33%	81%		
2.4	The increase in the time taken to determine planning applications is primarily due to a lack of staff resources to cope with the workload in three areas: development control; planning support; and legal services.							
<b>3.0</b>	<b><u>Development Control Staffing</u></b>							
3.1	The staffing level in the Development Control (3.4 full time equivalent planning officers) was almost at full complement during the second quarter of the year following recruitment of a planning assistant in July. The previous planning assistant post holder had left the Council during the last quarter of 2001/02. However, due to maternity leave requirements the staff complement will be reduced by half of a senior planning officer from late December until into the first quarter of 2003/04.							
3.2	Statistics for 2001, primarily collected by CIPFA, has been analysed to find out the typical staffing levels for authorities processing between 600 and 1000 planning and related applications per year. Eastbourne currently receives about 800 applications per year. 39 authorities processed between 600 and 1000 applications per year. The average number of applications per member of staff was 82. This was calculated by dividing the total number of applications by the full time equivalent staff in development control including support staff but excluding enforcement staff.							

3.3	<p>Therefore if the average staffing level is applied to Eastbourne a figure of 9.8 full time equivalent would be expected. At the time of the survey a staffing level of 7.5 was quoted for Eastbourne excluding enforcement staffing. Therefore there is a deficiency of 2.3 full time equivalent staff. During this financial year there has been some additional funding available to increase the support team and the estimated full time equivalent staff dealing with planning and related applications is budgeted to rise to 8.1. In order to meet the Government's targets for determining planning applications it is estimated that the number of professional planning officers in Development Control needs to be increased by 1.5 senior officers as well as an improved speed of service in legal services.</p>		
3.4	<p><b>A growth bid has been made as part of the service and financial planning exercise for 2003/04. A further 1.5 FTE senior planning officer posts have been bid for. In the short term it may be possible to employ agency staff although in practice there are rarely any planning officers with development control experience available.</b></p>		
4.0	<p><b><u>Administrative Support for Development Control</u></b></p>		
4.1	<p>Administrative Support for Development Control is below full complement due to staff leaving and long term illness. At full strength the full time equivalent should be at 4.7 but it currently stands at 3.1, 1.6 FTE below permanent complement. Temporary cover arrangements of 0.4 FTE have been made and some staff have been asked to work some extra hours. Much of the administrative work requires significant specialist training and the use of agency staff is of limited benefit unless the necessary training can be undertaken over a number of months. Performance can then dip because skilled staff are taken off their main duties to carry out the training. In a number of cases agency staff have left after a short period which has meant the time spent on training has been lost. Unless the tasks are fairly straightforward the agency staff are not as efficient as fully skilled and experienced staff. However an ex-employee who has a detailed knowledge of the systems and procedures has been recruited on a temporary part-time basis. Another ex-employee with some knowledge of the system has also been engaged for some temporary part-time work when available, which at maximum can equate to up to 0.3 FTE. Interviews are taking place in January to fill one part-time vacancy (0.6 FTE) with the expectation that person could start by March. Until the Support team is at full staff complement it is very difficult to assess whether the staffing level will equate to current workloads.</p>		
5.0	<p><b><u>Legal Staff Resources</u></b></p>		

5.1	<p>The time taken to process major applications has been significantly affected by delays in securing "Section 106" legal agreements for such matters contributions for such matters as affordable housing, recreational open space, flood compensation measures and highways/transport issues. A significant cause of the delay is due to staffing shortages in the Legal Services Division. The Head of Legal Services has recruited two new staff who will be in post by the end of February. This will bring the staff complement in legal services back to full strength.</p>		
5.2	<p>The County Council deals directly with legal agreements involving County issues such as highway requirements. The drafting of the County Council's legal agreements are not commenced until a decision in principle is made on the relevant planning application ie considered by the relevant Committee. This practice delays the determination of planning consent and should be changed to help speed up the process.</p>		
6.0	<p><b><u>Delegation</u></b></p>		
6.1	<p>A review of the delegation procedures has been undertaken and recommended changes have been formulated and were reported to the Planning and Licensing Committee at its meeting on 11 December 2002. The objective is to increase the percentage of decisions delegated by Members to officers. Any increased delegation is likely to improve planning application processing times although this will have to be carefully balanced with the need to maintain transparency in decision making and democratic accountability. Subject to ratification at Council on 22 January 2003 the new delegated arrangements will start to take affect in the last quarter of 2002/03. The level of delegation is currently at about 70% of all applications and it is anticipated that this could rise to between about 80% to 85%. The increased flexibility in determining applications will speed up the time taken to determine minor and householder applications.</p>		
7.0	<p><b><u>Consultations</u></b></p>		
7.1	<p>The matter was discussed at a meeting between the Deputy Leader, the Director of Planning, Regeneration and Amenities and the Head of Planning.</p>		
8.0	<p><b><u>Human Resource Implications</u></b></p>		
8.1	<p>The reasons why the time taken to determine planning applications has deteriorated during this year is primarily due to a lack of staff resources to cope with the workload in three areas: development control; planning support; and legal services. The report outlines the current deficiencies.</p>		
9.0	<p><b><u>Financial Implications</u></b></p>		

9.1	A growth bid has been made as part of the service and financial planning exercise for 2003/04. A further 1.5 FTE senior planning officer posts has been bid for which would cost £50,200.		
<b>10.0</b>	<b><u>Other Implications</u></b>		
10.1	There are no human rights, youth, environmental, anti-poverty or community safety implications as a direct result of this report.		
<b>11.0</b>	<b><u>Conclusion</u></b>		
11.1	The Cabinet, at its meeting on 5 December 2002, considered a report on performance monitoring information for the second quarter of the year and resolved amongst others that a further report be prepared for Cabinet concerning the performance in determining planning applications. The number of planning applications has increased significantly in the last three years from 626 in 1999 to 796 in 2003, a 27% increase. In addition there has been a substantial increase in the workload in development control generally as a result of inquiries by the public, solicitors and developers. Increased complexity has resulted from changes in Government regulations such as additional resources required to consider telecommunications proposals. Bringing the staffing levels in Legal Services, Planning Support and Development Control back to the existing compliment will assist in meeting the targets. The introduction of the revised delegated powers for determining planning applications will also help to improve the performance times. The increased volume and complexity of work requires additional staff resources to ensure a more sustainable improvement is achieved. The Planning Division Service and Financial Plan recommends that 1.5 FTE additional Senior Planning Officers are recruited during 2003/04. This is subject to the current decisions on future budget. An action plan will be drawn up to progress and monitor these changes in order to achieve an improved performance.		
Norman Kinnish			
Director of Planning, Regeneration & Amenities			

<p><b>Background Papers:</b></p> <p>The Background Papers used in compiling this report were as follows:</p> <p>Planning and Development Statistics 2001 compiled by The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) January 2002</p> <p>To inspect or obtain copies of background papers please refer to the contact officer listed above.</p>	
<p><a href="http://Gck/reports03/cabinet/planningperformancefebruary2003">Gck/reports03/cabinet/planningperformancefebruary2003</a></p>	