

Report to: Policy and Performance Advisory Committee

Date: 15 September 2020

Title: Review of the Development Management (DM) area of the Planning Service

Report of: Ian Fitzpatrick, Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Regeneration and Planning

Ward(s): All

Purpose of report: To advise on the operations & functions of the DM service

Officer recommendation(s):

- (1) To note the content of the report
- (2) To note and agree the action points highlighted in the report
- (3) to report back to the Policy and Performance Advisory Committee the progress on the action points in (2) above

Reasons for recommendations: To provide an efficient and economic Development Management service that is responsive to its customer base.

Contact Officer(s):

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1 Introduction

- 1.1 As members will know there are three broad areas of responsibility/activity within the Planning Service:-
- Building Control – responsible for applying the National Building Regulations which outline the structural issues relating to development
 - Planning Policy – responsible for delivering the Local and Neighbourhood Plans which aim to deliver sustainable development under a suite of strategic policies and land allocations
 - Development Management (DM)– responsible for processing all types of planning applications submitted to the Council for determination.
- 1.2 It is recognised that the DM function is one of the key customer facing services for the Council and that underperformance can give rise to reputational damage to the service in particular and the Council in general terms.

- 1.3 This report focuses on the development management area of the planning services with specific reference to the areas of potential service improvement over a number of theme/topic areas as outlined below.
- 1.4 It is acknowledged that this report will become more focused with a shorter action list over time. The list below is not an exhaustive list of actions and where appropriate additions and deletions will be made in consultation with the Chair of PPAC and the Director of Planning and Regeneration.
- 1.5 It is suggested that an update report will be made back to Planning and Performance Advisory Committee in Spring 2021.

2 Theme One Customer Engagement & Interaction

- 2.1 Under this theme the service has had a number of criticisms relating primarily to customers having poor/limited access to staff to discuss progress and issues on applications.

It should be noted that there will always be disgruntled applicants/neighbours if a particular decision has not gone their way; this theme though looks at the issues relating to the case officer contact in the lead up to the recommendations being made.

ISSUE	ACTION	TIMELINE	Responsible Officer
		Short 1-2 months	Manager case Workers MCW
		Medium 2-6 Months	Head of Planning HoP
		Long 12 months +	Senior Specialist Advisors SSA
<u>Theme 1 Customer Engagement & Interaction</u>			
1 Poor contact direct with the case officer	Supported home working technology including telephony– response to C19 - could include roll out of second screens for home use	SHORT	HoP
2 As above	Explore the potential to move an element telephony/indexing back with Customer Advisors	MEDIUM	MCW
3 As above	Instigate regular rounds of mystery shopping and report findings	SHORT	MCW & SSA Planning

4 Complaints handling and feedback	Formalise case conference reviews of significant complaints received (LGO and Stage 2 Complaints)	MEDUIM	HoP & SSA Planning
5 Customer Feedback	Instigate a LDC annual customer survey	LONG	HoP
6 Wider engagement	Planning User Group	MEDIUM	HoP
	Review the function of this group to understand if its meeting the wishes of the Members		
7 Complex enforcement cases	Scope the potential of the establishment of a 'Difficult Property Group' to support the Enforcement Team in processing complex cases	LONG	HoP & SSA Enforcement
8 Neighbour consultation letters	Review content of neighbour consultation letters to see if they aid contact with the case officer	MEDIUM	MCW & SSA Planning
9 Social Media	Explore the potential of utilising existing Social Media outlets/platforms to increase awareness of planning applications	MEDIUM	HoP

3 Theme Two Staffing & Establishment

- 3.1 This theme looks at current staffing levels alongside recruitment and retention issues as to whether these are impacting on service delivery.

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Theme 2 Staffing & Establishment			
10 Staff numbers	Review establishment and look to fill all current vacancies that exist within base budget	MEDIUM	HoP
11 Professional Qualifications	Continue to support (financial and day release) academic qualifications for three planning apprentices	SHORT	HoP
12 Unsupported staff	Embed a buddying system for more junior members of staff	SHORT	SSA Planning & MCW
13 Staff feeling exposed due to lack of experience	Embed a small geographical area teams to increase local understanding	SHORT	SSA Planning & MCW
14 South Downs National Park	Review the cost effectiveness of continuing to deliver this service	LONG	HoP
15 Staff survey (annual)	Respond to issues arising from the annual staff survey	LONG To report to PPAC where appropriate.	HoP + Others where appropriate

4 Theme Three Performance

- 4.1 This theme looks at performance of the DM team against nationally set performance indicators.

- 4.2 These performance indicators set nationally and look at the speed of processing major and non-major application and also the quality of those decision by way of the number of appeal that have been overturned by the Planning Inspectorate.
- 4.3 It is this area where the Council could be most affected by the reputational damage caused by under performance and where a number of the customer frustrations lay with the time taken to process applications.
- 4.4 For all of these national performance indicators there is the potential of 'Special Measures' designation if the indicators are not met.
- 4.5 The Government runs a rolling two year data set in an attempt to soften the periodic peaks and troughs in performance.
- 4.6 As can be seen by the latest set of data in Appendix 1 & 2 whilst the performance level is above the special measures threshold the position of the Council in comparison to other authorities is not where would want it to be.

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Theme 3 Performance			
16 Speed of validation Currently 50% validated within 5 Working Days	Restructure ways of working to ensure that 80% of submissions are validated within 5 working days	MEDIUM	SSA Planning
17 Speed of processing National Figures at Dec 2019 - 60% within 13 Weeks (Place 352) – 75% of non-major applications in time (8weeks) (Place 338)	Restructure ways of working to ensure that 80% of applications are determined within the 8 & 13 week National PI	MEDIUM	SSA Planning

18 External Peer Review	If performance does not take an upturn then engage with the services of the Planning Advisory Service to undertake a peer review	LONG Instigate if needed after reporting on the performance levels to PPAC in Spring 2021	HoP if appropriate
19 Tour of completed sites	To initiate a an annual tour of completed sites to inform staff/members of key issues	MEDIUM Subject to C19 restrictions then to report the progress to PPAC in Spring 2021	HoP & SSA Planning
20 Support for applications	To restructure ways of working to negotiate on submissions to result in more than a 90% approval rate across all application types	SHORT	SSA Planning
21 Added Value	Scope a reporting PI to capture where officer have added value to the proposal or scheme	MEDIUM	HoP & SSA Planning
22 Major Applications Lead (Principal Planner)	Scope the potential of creating a Major Applications Lead (Principle Planning Officer) role to oversee all aspects of the Major Applications processing	MEDIUM	HoP & SSA Planning
23 Delegated sign off	If Major Applications Lead is created then scope the potential to separate the delegated function	MEDIUM	HoP SSA Planning

	from the processing of major applications		
24 Reduce number of Extension of Time request as a % of all Major and Non-Major Applications - currently running at 31%	Under 10% of applications relying on Extensions of Time	MEDIUM	SSA Planning
25 Design Advice	To establish and embed an Architects Advisory Panel to be a critical friend on design related matters	MEDIUM	HoP & SSA Planning

5. Financial appraisal

- 5.1 All of the recommended actions here save for additional posts can be scoped, undertaken and implemented from within the existing establishment and there should not be significant financial exposure.

6. Legal implications

- 6.1 There are no legal risks to these initiatives/suggestions.

7. Appendices

- 7.1 There are no background papers connected to this report.

8. Background papers

- 8.1 There are no background papers connected to this report