

Report to: Policy and Performance Advisory Committee

Date: 25 January 2021

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

Report of: Leigh Palmer, Head of Planning

Ward(s): All

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

Officer recommendation: (1) To note the updated information within the report.
(2) to report back to PPAC the progress on the action points in 1 above after 6 months.

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

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1 Introduction

1.1 At the meeting of the Committee in September 2020, several initiatives and service development proposals in relation the Development Management were agreed and endorsed.

1.2 This report provides members with a three-month update. Members will recall that there were 25 action areas over three key themes, this has been supplemented by two additional criteria looking at appeal overturns and a PI looking at planning enforcement. The summary of the progress made is reported in table 1 below and further explanation is included with the body of the report:

Performance Indicator (PI) met – action concluded 8
Some action taken and or work in progress 11
Not started – No action taken 8

One key change since the last report is the formation of a dedicated planning department under the Planning First branding.

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This will enable clarity over line management responsibilities, budgeting, and performance management.

2 Theme One Customer Engagement & Interaction

2.1 Under this theme the service has had several 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:

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 - Concluded - 2nd screen roll out has been concluded. All staff have telephony to enable working from home. Established a 'Customer Charter for Development Control' that establishes customers.

2. **Poor contact direct with the case officer** - Explore the potential to move an element telephony/indexing back with Customer Advisors - Outstanding - Waiting for the new recruits to become established to understand if this remains an issue.

3. **Poor contact direct with the case officer** - Instigate regular rounds of mystery shopping and report findings - Outstanding - Waiting for the new recruits to be established and they this will be rolled out.

4. **Complaints handling and feedback** - Concluded - Initiated Service Improvement Group where these issues are discussed.

5. **Customer Feedback** Instigate a LDC annual customer survey - Outstanding - In discussion with Planning Advisory Service to understand the National picture and take learning points.

6. **Wider engagement** – Planning User Group - Review the function of this group to understand if its meeting the wishes of the Members - Outstanding - Chair of PUG has requested greater breadth of issues (key themes etc and emerging policy) brought to the group. These are now standing items.

7. **Complex enforcement cases** - Scope the potential of the establishment of a 'Difficult Property Group' to support the Enforcement Team in processing complex cases - Outstanding - Planning Enforcement Lead commenced 14 December this is to be picked up in the coming months.

8. **Neighbour consultation letters** - Service Improvement Group are looking at this issue with resolution being discussed to include direct dial numbers.

9 **Social Media** – Outstanding Service Improvement Group are looking at this issue with resolution being discussed to include weekly lists pushed out via our Social Media Platforms.

3 **Theme Two Staffing and Establishment**

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

10 **Staff numbers** – Concluded - A review & recruitment regime has been concluded, with 7 offers made. This is in addition to the enforcement officer.

11 **Professional Qualifications** – Concluded - Continue to support (financial and day release) academic qualifications for three planning apprentices. This has been agreed. The opportunity will be extended to others when the current cohort graduate.

12 **Unsupported staff** -Outstanding - Embed a buddying system for more junior members of staff - Will be rolling this out when all new recruits are in post.

13 **Staff feeling exposed due to lack of experience** - Embed a small geographical area teams to increase local understanding – Concluded - all new recruits assigned to geographical area.

14 **South Downs National Park** - Concluded = The new recruits have given us the opportunity to continue with the SDNPA contract to next review in the Autumn 2022.

15 **Staff survey (annual)** - Respond to issues arising from the annual staff survey and any internal – external audit of the service – Outstanding - Liaised internally on this and next staff review is awaited.

4 **Theme Three Performance**

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

4.2 These performance indicators at the speed of processing major and non-major application and the quality of those decision by way of the number of appeals 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 several the customers raise issues with the time taken to process applications.

- 4.4 The Government runs a rolling two-year data set to soften the periodic peaks and troughs in performance.
- 4.5 For all of these national performance indicators there is the potential of 'Special Measures' designation if the indicators are not met.

16. Local PI, 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 - Outstanding - The end of year performance has dropped to 45%.. This will pick up when new recruits are in post.

17. National PI 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 – Outstanding - Below the PI of 80% but acknowledgment that the team are climbing the national performance table. National figure of 66% of major Applications within 13 weeks (Place 343). National figure of 76% of non-major applications with 8 weeks (Place 331).

18. National PI Number of Appeals overturned (no more than 10% for either category) Concluded - Regular review of cases to ensure that this PI is maintained. Majors 0% of applications appealed overturned. Non major 1.5% of application appealed overturned.

19 Local PI Number of enforcement cases opened and closed - Outstanding - Instil ways of working and training to ensure at least cases that are opened match cases closed - For 2020 239 cases opened ,174 closed. These needs to closer aligned.

20 Local PI supported with external resource. External Peer - Review Outstanding - Liaising with Planning Advisory Service about undertaking a peer review and this may start with a review of the form and function of Planning Committee.

21 Local PI Tour of completed sites - To initiate an annual tour of completed sites to inform staff/members of key issues – Outstanding - No progress due to C19 and other pressures.

22. Local PI 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 - Achieved - For the year end we granted 89.4% of applications received. This is being embedded as a standard item on the Service Improvement Group.

23 Scope a reporting PI - Scope to capture where officer have added value to the proposal or scheme - Outstanding - Discussion are continuing with external consultant to engage with our back-office systems to deliver necessary reporting.

24 **Local issue - Major Applications Lead (Principal Planner)** - Outstanding - Placed on hold pending arrival of new recruits and a review of the necessity of this role.

25 **Local issue Delegated sign off** - Outstanding. - Placed on hold pending arrival of new recruits and a review of the necessity of this role.

26 **Local PI 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 - Outstanding - Year end 31% of decisions made were with the support of an Extension of Time.

27. **Local Issue Design Advice** - To establish and embed an Architects Advisory Panel to be a critical friend on design related matters – Outstanding - This needs to be formalised with a calendar of meetings for the calendar year.

5. **Financial appraisal**

5.1 All 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 None

8. **Background Papers**

8.1 There are no background papers connected to this report.