

TITLE	: PERFORMANCE INDICATORS FOR PLANNING APPLICATIONS		
TO / ON	: Economy, Environment & transport	23 September 2003	
	Scrutiny Commission		
	Planning Control Committee	07 October 2003	
FROM	: Borough Planning & Economic Development Officer		
STATUS	: FOR PUBLICATION		

1.0 TYPE OF DECISION

1.1 What type of decision is to be taken:-

EXECUTIVE DECISION				COUNCIL DECISION
Key	No	Non Key	No	No

1.2 If a key decision, has it been included in the Forward Plan

Inclusion in Forward Plan	No	Date of Plan	Not Applicable
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2.0 SUMMARY

This report describes the statistics relating to planning applications, and gives an assessment on how the service is performing in relation to national targets. It also sets out the current action plan to improve performance further.

3.0 **OPTIONS AND RECOMMENDED OPTIONS (with reasons)**

<p>Options:</p> <p>To note the performance figures and the action plans. To request any modifications to the action plans.</p> <p>Recommended Option:</p> <p>That the Commission note the performance data and agree the action plans (subject to any requested modifications).</p>

4.0 **THIS REPORT HAS THE FOLLOWING IMPLICATIONS**

Corporate Aims	Improving Transport and the Environment. Improving the Quality and availability of Council Services Creating a better future for all generations.
Policy Framework	Unitary Development Plan The Community Strategy
Statement by Monitoring Officer	To be reported verbally at the meeting.
Statement by Director of Finance & E-Government	To be reported verbally at the meeting.
Human Resource IT/Land and Property Implications	None
Wards/Area Boards affected	All Wards and Area Boards

Scrutiny Panel's Interest

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Consultations

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Call-in

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Briefings

Executive Members/ Chair		Chief Executive	
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5.0 INTRODUCTION

5.1 Of the Council's 40 priority performance indicators, the following ones relate to the Development Control part of the Planning service:

- PI106 - % of new dwellings built on brownfield land
- PI109 (a) % of major applications dealt with in 13 weeks
- (b) % of minor applications dealt with in 8 weeks
- (c) % of other applications dealt with in 8 weeks
- PI188 - % of decisions on planning applications delegated to officers

5.2 This year, a new PI is being introduced, PI111 – The % of applicants satisfied with the service. This will require a survey which will be done at the end of the financial year, using consultants, with the costs shared between several Councils.

6.0 NUMBERS OF APPLICATIONS

6.1 Bury is one of the smaller Greater Manchester local planning authorities, in terms of the number of applications received last year.

Table 1 : Number of Applications 2002/03

Stockport	2,783
Manchester	2,505
Bolton	2,392
Trafford	2,268
Wigan	2,125
Oldham	1,654
Salford	1,568
Bury	1,520
Tameside	1,505
Rochdale	1,414

- 6.2 However, over the last 3 years, Bury has seen a 39% increase in the number of planning applications. This is the highest percentage increase in Greater Manchester.

Table 2 : Percentage Increase in Applications 2000/01 to 2002/03

Bury	39%
Tameside	36%
Bolton	34%
Oldham	25%
Salford	19%
Wigan	14%
Stockport	12%
Rochdale	8%
Trafford	7%
Manchester	5%

7.0 *PI106 - % OF NEW DWELLINGS BUILT ON BROWNFIELD LAND*

- 7.1 Bury has been performing well on this PI and the figures have been getting better over the last few years. The Government's target of 60% has been easily achieved in the last 3 years, and the regional target of 80% was met in 2000/01 and 2002/03. It is likely to be met again this year.

Table 3 % of New Dwellings on Brownfield Land

1999/00	54%
2000/01	81%
2001/02	76%
2002/03	85%

7.2 Action Plan for PI106 (Homes on brownfield land)

Ensure that the UDP is kept up-to-date. (It is currently being reviewed.)
 Ensure that individual applications are determined in accordance with the UDP.

8.0 *PI109 (b) and (c) - % of Minor/Other Applications Dealt with in 8 Weeks*

- 8.1 Last year the minor category accounted for 23% of our applications and the Other category accounted for 74% of our applications. Together they accounted for 97% of our applications.
- 8.2 "Minor and "Other" applications include the following:

Minor

Less than 10 dwellings or ½ hectare of housing
 Less than 1 hectare of non residential land
 Less than 1,000 sq m of non residential building

Other

Change of use
 Householder Applications
 Advertisements
 Listed Building Consent
 Conservation Area Consent

- 8.3 PI 109(b) and (c) are new indicators this year. Data on them is being collected as the year progresses. Full information will not be available until the end of the financial year. However, informal information is available for the 1st quarter of this financial year for a small number of AGMA authorities. Also, our own internal records are able to show how Bury is doing so far this year, on a month-by-month basis.
- 8.4 For **Minor** applications (PI109(b)) the Government has set a target of 65% of applications to be decided within 8 weeks. Of the 5 months recorded this financial year, 3 of the months have been above the government target. The July figure missed the target by only 2 percentage points.

Table 4 Minor Applications decided in 8 weeks (Target of 65%)

April	47%
May	81%
June	82%
July	63%
August	77%

- 8.5 Information about performance on Minor and Other applications in the first quarter of this year is only available from 4 of the 10 Greater Manchester authorities. Bury is the best of those 4 by a long way, but on the basis of such sparse data no firm conclusions could be drawn.

Table 5 : Minor Applications : 1st Quarter 2003/04 (Target 65%)

Bury	72%
Rochdale	58%
Stockport	55%
Oldham	52%

- 8.6 For **Other applications (PI 109c)** the Government has set a target of 80% of applications to be decided within 8 weeks. Of the 5 months recorded this financial year, 3 of the months have been above the government target.

Table 6 Other Applications Decided in 8 weeks (Target of 80%)

April	71.4%
May	86%
June	90%
July	70.9%
August	95%

- 8.7 For the first quarter of this financial year, performance can only be compared with the other 3 authorities which have provided informal information. Again, Bury has the best figures but the other 3 authorities are close behind.

Table 7 : Other Applications : 1st Quarter 2003/04 (Target 80%)

Bury	86%
Stockport	81%
Rochdale	80%
Oldham	76%

8.8 Action Plan for PI 109 (b) and (c) (Minor and Other Applications)

Make greater use of delegated powers. These powers were extended when the Council's new constitution was introduced. The effect is being monitored and a report is to be prepared suggesting how delegated powers might be extended further.

Temporary planner to be appointed to backfill the post of permanent planner seconded to computer work. Interviews are being held at the time of writing.

Temporary planner to be appointed to help with backlog, funded through the Planning Delivery Grant. Interviews being held at the time of writing.

Development Manager appointed to manage both Development Control and Building Control. Interviews held and successful candidate to start on November 3rd.

New computer software system to be installed, which will require better ways of working, introduce electronic document management, provide better and more frequent management information, and lead to applications being made "down the wire". Contract for new system signed this September. Installation and training over the autumn and winter months.

Encouragement of pre-application discussion and the preparation of guidance leaflets on the more common applications e.g. shop fronts, cab hire offices, child nurseries etc. This should lead to applications with fewer problems. Funding available from the Planning Delivery Grant to pay for outside assistance to compile the guidance.

Adoption of Supplementary Planning Guidance about domestic extensions. It will provide clearer guidance in what can be a difficult and complex area. The SPG has been written, consulted upon and is being redrafted so that it can be considered by Planning Control Committee in November this year.

Adoption of a firmer approach to poor quality applications. The new Development Manager will be able to provide closer day-to-day supervision of the caseload, to ensure a sharper approach at the front end.

Appointment of an extra Planning Enforcement post, additional to the existing 1½ posts. This will reduce the need for DC staff to get drawn into enforcement work.

9.0 **PI109(A) - % OF MAJOR APPLICATIONS DEALT WITH IN 13 WEEKS**

9.1 Major application are defined as:

More than 10 dwellings or ½ hectare of housing land.
More than 1,000 sq m of non residential building.
More than 1 hectare of non-residential land.

9.2 PI109(a) is also a new indicator this year. For Major applications, the Government has set a target of 60% to be decided within 13 weeks. It is known that no authority in the UK is achieving this figure. The target has been heavily criticised in the professional journals for being out of touch with the real world of property development. (See Appendix). Although the government target is 65%, research has shown that the average figure achieved by local planning authorities is 44%. No local planning authority has yet achieved the government target of 60%.

9.3 There is no possibility of Bury achieving 60% in the short term. As a result, a local target of 45% has been adopted as an interim target, and because it is compatible with the national average. Of the 5 months recorded this financial year, no month has reached the Government target, although May was close. May was also the only month to reach our local target.

Table 8 : Major applications determined in 13 weeks (Local Target of 45%; National Target of 65%)

April	17%	6 applications
May	63%	8 applications
June	33%	6 applications
July	17%	6 applications
August	0%	2 applications

9.4 The figures vary greatly from month to month because Bury has relatively few Major applications – 43 in 2002/03 (7% of the total). This small figure greatly sways the figures month by month. The figure of 0% for August was caused by having only 2 Major applications available for processing and both happen to have taken longer than 13 weeks.

9.5 In the first quarter of this financial year, Bury processed 40% of its Major applications in 13 weeks. This is somewhat below the national average performance of 44%, but a good way behind Rochdale and Stockport, the only AGMA authorities for which information is available.

Table 9 : Major Applications : 1st Quarter 2003/04

Stockport	58%
Rochdale	56%
Oldham	45%
Bury	40%

9.6 The national target may not be held in high regard and has been subject to strong criticism. It is said that it will discourage public consultation and Member involvement, and will reduce the opportunity for proper scrutiny of significant projects that could have a great impact on a community. Nevertheless, it is clear that we have some way to go to catch up with the performance of several other AGMA authorities.

9.7 **Action Plan for PI109(a) (Major Applications)**

All the actions listed in para 8.7 for Minor and Other applications will be helpful.

To continue giving a “health check” to all Major applications before they are registered, and returning unsatisfactory ones with an advice note about how they can be altered or improved.

At the moment all Major applications have to be reported to Committee. It would be helpful if some of these could be delegated:

- Schemes that raise no issues or have no objectors e.g. a factory extension in an industrial area.
- Applications that are technically deficient in vital areas e.g. a housing scheme that has no Traffic Impact Assessment.
- Applications where the developer is unduly slow about providing extra information, the need for which is only recognised as the application is progressed e.g. revised drawings, or a tree survey.

Developers will often wish to make a planning application as soon as possible in order to lay down a marker to their backers and to the Council about the seriousness of their intent. The assumption is that any details and problem will be sorted out as the application progresses. However, this approach can make it difficult for a final decision or even a desirable scheme to be reached in 13 weeks. Often, it may not be felt appropriate for the Council to issue a Refusal Notice because it would send the wrong message. In such cases, the applicant should be urged to withdraw the application before the 13th week, whilst discussions continue. When all the problems are ironed-out, a revised application could be made, which would stand a better chance of being processed in 13 weeks.

Section 106 Agreements are increasingly necessary with Major applications, to ensure the provision of open space and play areas in a housing scheme, for instance. Unfortunately, the decision notice on an application cannot be issued until the s106 Agreement is signed. This legal process can easily add months to a planning application. The s106 process needs to be streamlined and standardised. This cannot easily be achieved whilst the Council relies on locum Planning Solicitors from agencies. However, it is intended that a permanent and full-time Planning Solicitor be appointed. This will provide greater staff continuity which will enable the s106 process to be examined and re-engineered.

10.0 **PI188 - % OF DECISIONS ON PLANNING APPLICATIONS DELEGATED TO OFFICERS**

- 10.1 Increased delegation can mean a faster turn-around of applications. Consequently, Central Government has set a target of 90% delegated for every local authority. This high figure has caused some disquiet amongst Councillors nationally and in the planning profession. Increased delegation means a reduced involvement for elected members and more decisions being made “behind closed doors”.
- 10.2 Since the start of 2000, Bury’s percentage of delegated items has risen from about 68% and is now 85%, which is close to the national target of 90%.
- 10.3 In comparison with other Greater Manchester authorities, Bury is in the middle band, with only Manchester and Trafford hitting the national target. However, since 2000 Bury has had the joint second biggest increase in delegations (17 percentage points). The highest increase was Trafford, at 18 percentage points.

Table 10 : % Decisions Delegated to Officers

	2002/03	Percent Points Change Since 2000/01
Manchester	91%	-1%
Trafford	91%	+18%
Tameside	88%	+17%
Stockport	88%	+20%
Wigan	88%	+12%
Bury	85%	+17%
Bolton	82%	+2%
Oldham	81%	+5%
Salford	72%	+10%
Rochdale	66%	-3%

10.4 **Action Plan for PI188 - % of decisions delegated:**

To make the greatest use of the current delegated powers.

To monitor and review these powers, as described above.

To encourage pre-application discussions and provide guidance leaflets in order to receive applications with fewer problems.

To adopted Supplementary Planning Guidance on Domestic Extensions and to delegate approvals to officers, even where there are objections. Provided the proposal is clearly in accordance with the SPG. Doubtful cases would still need to go to Committee.

To arrange applicants to discuss proposals with their neighbours before they make their application.

11.0 CONCLUSION

- 11.1 Bury's Development Control performance has been much improved in recent years, despite a 39% increase in the number of applications. For brownfield development and for Minor and Other applications our performance is good. The appointment of a Development Manager should ensure that these improvements are consolidated and taken further.
- 11.2 We are still underperforming slightly in relation to the national target about Delegation. Minor changes to procedure are likely to rectify this.
- 11.3 The main area for attention is in relation to Major applications, which is true for every local planning authority in the country.

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Background documents:

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PLANNING MAGAZINE
JULY 04 2003

“BETTER PERFORMANCE CLOUDS TARGET FAILURE

There must be something very wrong when councils continually miss a target by more than 20 per cent.

On average, district planning authorities in England deal with 44 per cent of major applications within 13 weeks, compared with the official target of 65 per cent. Whilst last year's introduction of three separate development control targets was welcome, the ODPM should look again at this particular target – and why councils are falling so short.

Ministers may have thought that they were being generous in allowing authorities a 13-week rather than an 8-week timescale for dealing with bigger applications. But major development proposals are extremely time-consuming, requiring a great deal of research, negotiation and consultation. If an authority has to deal with a very large scheme, such as a town centre redevelopment, it may take up much of its staff time for months, dragging down its major application record.

Even if councils can deal with the planning issues – and delivery grant cash is likely to be a great help – the need to tie up complex legal agreements will often rule out any chance of meeting the deadline. To get round this problem, the government could accept that finalising section 106 deals should not be included in the time period. Better still it could lower the target or replace it with local contracts between authorities and developers, establishing a time frame for dealing with the application.

This would mean that scrutiny of these important schemes is not sacrificed by the quest for speed, while ensuring that the planning authority does not prevaricate unnecessarily. It would also give the applicant certainty, a quality that developers arguably cherish more than speed.”
