



REPORT FOR DECISION

Agenda Item	
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MEETING: PLANNING CONTROL COMMITTEE

DATE: 21 APRIL 2009

SUBJECT: PLANNING PERFORMANCE

REPORT FROM: ASSISTANT DIRECTOR (Planning, Engineering and Transportation Services)

CONTACT OFFICER: TOM MITCHELL – DEVELOPMENT MANAGER

TYPE OF DECISION: COUNCIL

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION STATUS: This paper is within the public domain

SUMMARY:
The report provides a brief analysis of performance within Development Control for the year 2008/9 with comparisons from previous years.

OPTIONS AND RECOMMENDED OPTION (with reasons):
The Committee is recommended to note the report.

IMPLICATIONS -

- Corporate Aims/Policy Framework:** N/A
- Financial Implications and Risk Considerations** N/A
- Statement by Director of Finance and E-Government:** N/A
- Equality/Diversity implications:** N/A

Considered by Monitoring Officer: N/A

Are there any legal implications? No

Staffing/ICT/Property: N/A

Wards Affected: ALL

Scrutiny Interest: N/A

TRACKING/PROCESS

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR:

Chief Executive/ Management Board	Executive Member/ Chair	Ward Members	Partners
Scrutiny Commission	Executive	Committee	Council

1.0 BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The performance of the Council in terms of the Development Control function is subject to considerable scrutiny, formerly through the Best Value Performance Indicator 109 and now the National Performance Indicator 157 which measures the speed of decision making for 3 categories of application – Major, Minor and Other (which includes house extensions).
- 1.2 The last of these categories is also included within the suite of Local Priority Indicators.
- 1.3 Attached to this report is a table of current and past statistics and a chart illustrating the improvements in NPI.157 since 2002.
- 1.4 The speed of decision making only measures the quantitative aspects of the service and is not necessarily a true measure of the quality of the service but it is nonetheless used to assess the Council and has been used to decide how much Planning Delivery Grant has been made available to the Council, although for 2008/9 this is no longer the case. This grant is now titled the Housing and Planning delivery Grant and includes an element for the number of new dwellings constructed. Bury has been awarded £182,123 for 2008/9 and was the third highest award in Greater Manchester, behind Manchester and Salford

- 1.5 The importance of a speedy and efficient service is however also linked to good standards of customer service and applicants should expect a reasonable prompt determination of their planning application.
- 1.6 The statistics for development control are submitted to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister on a quarterly basis and are published regularly.

2.0 APPLICATION CASELOAD

- 2.1 The situation in Bury has reflected the national trend in the current economic climate. The number of applications received in the year has fallen by 16% compared to the previous year, however some Authorities are reporting falls of 25% and higher, and contrary to the experience in other Authorities, the number of applications for major development in Bury has risen by 14% in the period. The biggest reduction here in Bury has been in householder development which has fallen by 28%
- 2.2 The staffing level for case officers has been reduced following the loss of one post through VER and one officer opting to work reduced hours. The staffing currently comprises 5.8 (fte) Planning Officers (qualified to RTP1 standard), and 2 (fte) Assistant Planning Officers. The staff are organised into 2 teams - the Major Applications Team (MAT) and the Planning Application Team (PAT) which is focused on improving performance and the quality of service in respect of the majority of planning applications including Householder Applications. (We have also been able to repeat the previous year's performance for householder applications and - 99% were decided within 8 weeks.)
- 2.3 The staffing in the technical support team processing the applications has also been reduced by 2 through VER and one officer obtaining a post elsewhere. It is not currently proposed to replace these members of staff, given the current state of economic activity. It is also proposed to transfer one of the support team to a new post of Planning Enforcement Technician to support the work of Enforcement (which has not had any significant reduction in case load).
- 2.4 Information on last year's appeal and enforcement performance is included in separate reports.

3.0 SPEED OF DECISIONS

Currently, all 3 categories of application are being decided well above the Government targets and the service is amongst the best performing Councils in the Country.

- 3.1 The speed of performance in respect of Committee decisions is understandably below the set targets and this year has fallen well below last year's figure.

3.2 The attached table indicates that the percentage of all decisions which have been delegated to officers, has stabilised at 91% which is in line with the general national trend, although many authorities have now hit high figures and 95% is not unusual.

4.0 SERVICE IMPROVEMENTS

4.2 The year has seen a number of developments and changes both internally and externally.

4.3 Externally:

- We now have a totally new set of rules for domestic permitted development and as a consequence are redrafting the current guidance we provide.
- The Planning Inspectorate have revised the rules for appeals including a reduction of the time for appeals to 12 weeks for householder development.
- Electronic submissions are increasing with around 40% now submitted on line.
- Central government continues to issue new guidance and consultations on changes on a regular basis.

4.4 Internally:

- The Job Evaluation has been disruptive and affected a number of staff
- There have been 5 VERs in Building and Development Control.
- We are now have a fully electronic system of consultations with facility for on-line comments
- EDRM is being rolled out to include the Enforcement Team.
- We have engaged in a joint project with Bolton and consultants Adding Value (AGMA funding) to review procedures and processes.
- We have developed a more formal approach to pre-application enquiries recording the details electronically. In the first 3 months of the year we recorded 54 formal enquiries about possible development. (excluding householder enquiries).

5.0 CONCLUSION

5.1 Performance of decision making is a major factor in external views of the service and good performance is key to both customer care standards and recognition from the DCLG and other inspection regimes.

5.2 The current performance levels are considered to be exceptional and reflect well on all staff who have contributed. These levels have been maintained with no additional resources, but by a sustained focus on performance issues

by all staff. In the coming year there will be fewer staff and it will be challenging to maintain performance.

- 5.3 There continues to be a range of work in the section which is over and above the actual applications which are processed.

List of Background Papers:- None

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