

REPORT FOR DECISION

Bury
COUNCIL

**Agenda
Item**

MEETING: PLANNING CONTROL COMMITTEE

DATE: 20 APRIL 2010

SUBJECT: PLANNING PERFORMANCE

REPORT FROM: CHIEF PLANNING OFFICER

CONTACT OFFICER: TOM MITCHELL – CHIEF PLANNING OFFICER

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 2009/10 with comparisons from previous years (Appendix).

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

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 (appended) illustrating the improvements in NPI.157 and other statistics since 2003.
- 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 2009/10 this is no longer the case. This grant is now titled the Housing and Planning delivery Grant and includes elements for the number of new dwellings constructed and plan making. Planning performance is now only used to abate any grant awarded. Bury has been awarded £161,000 for 2009/10, with no abatement and was the fourth highest award in Greater Manchester.
- 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 decided in the year has fallen by 20% compared to the previous year and 29% compared to 2007/8.
- 2.2 The staffing currently comprises 6 (fte) Planning Officers (qualified to RTPI standard), and 2 (fte) Assistant Planning Officers (one of whom has been on maternity leave and is due to return to work this month). 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 – 98.5% were decided within 8 weeks.)
- 2.3 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.

	Target	No. of decisions	No. decided within target	% within target
Majors	60% within 13 weeks	41 (51)	34 (44)	83% (86%)
Minors	65% within 8 weeks	241(279)	227 (254)	94% (91%)
Others	80% within 8 weeks	752 (963)	730 (931)	97% (97%)

- 3.1 The speed of performance in respect of Committee decisions is understandably below the set targets (61%) but this year has improved back up to the levels of 2007/8..
- 3.2 The attached table indicates that the percentage of all decisions which have been delegated to officers, has dropped slightly to 89% but this still remains generally in line with a level which is considered reasonable, although many authorities have now hit high figures and 95% is not unusual.

4.0 Service changes.

- 4.2 The year has seen a number of developments and changes both internally and externally.
- 4.3 Externally:
- We have completed the review of the current guidance for house extensions (SPD6) and this has now been published.

- The Planning Inspectorate have introduced further revised the rules for appeals.
- Electronic submissions continue to increase and in some months this has exceeded 50%.
- Central government continues to issue new guidance and consultations on changes on a regular basis. This has now included revised permitted development rules for non householder development and the promotion of “Development Management” as opposed to “Development Control”.
- Regulations have now introduced the concept of a “Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) to replace s106 agreements. This will not have any immediate implications for Bury but will potentially become an issue next year.
- Two years ago we produced the checklist for validating the quality of planning applications and we are now required to review the checklist by December 2010.
- The economic recession has reduced the a number of applications and hence the fee income for the service but has created newer challenges and workloads relating to enquires, pre-application advice and enforcement activity.

4.4 Internally:

- Following the sad loss of Brian Daniel temporary management arrangements have been put in place but the post remains vacant.
- We have moved offices to the new development at Knowlsey Place

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 by a sustained focus on performance issues by all staff.
- 5.3 There continues to be a range of work in the section which is over and above the actual applications which are processed. This is compounded by significant amount of external change both in terms of the economic environment and regulatory changes.

List of Background Papers:- None

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