

REPORT FOR DECISION

Agenda Item	
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DECISION OF:	PLANNING CONTROL COMMITTEE
DATE:	20th SEPTEMBER 2011
SUBJECT:	DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT PERFORMANCE
REPORT FROM:	DEVELOPMENT MANAGER
CONTACT OFFICER:	JOHN CUMMINS
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 Management Team for the year 2010/11 with comparisons from previous years (Appendix).
OPTIONS & RECOMMENDED OPTION	The Committee is recommended to the note the report and appendix.
IMPLICATIONS:	
Corporate Aims/Policy Framework:	Do the proposals accord with the Policy Framework? N/A
Statement by the S151 Officer: Financial Implications and Risk Considerations:	Executive Director of Resources to advise regarding risk management N/A
Statement by Executive Director of Resources:	N/A
Equality/Diversity implications:	N/A
Considered by Monitoring Officer:	N/A
Wards Affected:	ALL

Scrutiny Interest:	N/A
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TRACKING/PROCESS

DIRECTOR:

Chief Executive/ Strategic Leadership Team	Executive Member/Chair	Ward Members	Partners
Scrutiny Committee	Committee	Council	

1.0 Background

- 1.1 The performance of the Council in terms of the Development Management function is subject to considerable scrutiny, and following a review of National Indicators the one on the processing of Planning Applications, NI157 has been retained. This 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 2004/5.
- 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. This used to be a measure to assess the amount of Housing and Planning delivery Grant the Council received, but last May this was withdrawn by the new coalition Government and has not been replaced.
- 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 Department of Communities and Local Government on a quarterly basis and are published regularly.

2.0 Application Caseload and Fees

- 2.1 The situation in Bury has been mixed and has bucked the ‘national trend’ in some areas, but forecasting remains very difficult in the current climate. The number of applications received in 2010/11 was up 15% to 1,317 and the fees increased to £493,041.50. So far in 2011 the number of applications have remained static (600c.) but the fees so far this year are up by 65% to £233,332 for the first 5 months of the year, compared with the same period in 2010/11.

2.2 The staffing of the Development Management team has reduced since 2009/10 with the loss of one Planning Officer Post and one Technical Officer Post and currently comprises 5 (fte) Planning Officers (qualified to RTPI standard); Development Manager roll, and 2 (fte), Assistant Planning Officers and a Planning Technician with relevant membership of the RTPI giving a total of 8 professional staff. 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. They are supported by a Technical Support Team comprising a Senior Technical Support Officer and 3 Support Officers (One post being shared) .We have exceeded the previous year's high performance by deciding 97.18% of normal applications within 8 weeks.

2.3 Information on last year's Appeal performance is included in a separate report.

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. (2010/11 figures in brackets)

	Target	No. of decisions	No. decided within target	% within target
Majors	60% within 13 weeks	30(41)	26 (34)	86.67% (83%)
Minors	65% within 8 weeks	303(241)	274(227)	90.43% (94%)
Others	80% within 8 weeks	805 (752)	782 (730)	97.18% (97%)

3.1 The speed of performance in respect of Committee decisions is understandably below the set targets and was 56.3% (61%) in 2010/11 and similar to 2006/7.

3.2 The attached table indicates that the percentage of all decisions which have been delegated to officers and performance has increased slightly to 91% (89%). This still remains generally in line with a level which is considered reasonable, although many authorities have now hit figures of 95%. This could be regarded as 'best practice' and something we should aim for in the future, but it may mean that the scheme of delegation may need to change.

4.0 Service changes.

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

4.3 Externally:

- PDG has been abolished
- The Planning Inspectorate have introduced further revised the rules for Appeals.
- Electronic submissions continue to increase and in some months this has exceeded 60% (50%).
- Central government continues to issue new guidance and consultations on changes on a regular basis. Including the NPPF (National Planning Policy Framework) and Local Fees Setting

- Regulations have now been introduced about the concept of a “Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) that become fully effective in 2014, but do now have implications, especially where contributions are required from developers for such things as ‘Recreational’ provision and the like, contained within our suite of Supplementary Planning Documents, % for Art, Affordable Housing etc.
- The economic recession has continued to depress the number of applications received. The service has reacted to newer challenges and workloads relating to enquires, pre-application advice and enforcement activity. In 2010/11 some 189 formal pre-application enquiries were dealt with by the team giving practicable advice to both businesses and members of the public about their prospective applications.

4.4 Internally:

- Following the appointment of Tom Mitchell to Assistant Director of EDS responsible for Planning, Environmental and Regulatory Services, his former roll has been split between John Cummins and Dave Marno who now act as joint Development Mangers
- The team have taken over responsibility for processing applications for works to trees protected by Tree Preservation Orders as well as the review and designation of new TPO’s and Enforcement of the legislation.
- One post has been lost with the removal of PDG for a technical support officer and they were made redundant. Two members of staff have been transferred/seconded to EDS finance and Building Control and their posts have remained vacant within the team for the year, one Planning Officer Post and one Technical Support post.

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 have continued to be exceptional and reflect well on all staff involved. These levels have been maintained by a sustained focus on performance issues by all staff during a particularly difficult time following the Pay and Grading Review and changes to staff terms and conditions of employment.
- 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. The new NPPF, Localism Act and Local Fees Setting all have particular challenges for the rest of 2011/12 and for the foreseeable future and the PCC will be kept informed of changes that arise as a result.

List of Background Papers:- None

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