

REPORT FOR DECISION

Agenda Item	
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DECISION OF:	PLANNING CONTROL COMMITTEE
DATE:	17th APRIL 2012
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 2011/12 with comparisons from previous years
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? Yes
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:	No (Each application is considered having regards to these requirements)
Considered by Monitoring Officer:	No Not required

Wards Affected:	All
Scrutiny Interest:	No

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. In section 3.0 there is a table of current and past statistics.
- 1.3 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.
- 1.4 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. In 2011 the service took part in a national benchmarking exercise that also measured the satisfaction of all users of the service and a short analysis of that report is included. (Appendix 1)
- 1.5 The statistics for development control are submitted to the Department of Communities and Local Government on a quarterly basis and are published regularly.
- 1.6 However, given the continued challenges that the service faces and working closely with our colleagues in AGMA we are also now looking at measuring data on the physical impacts on the basis of the value of permissions granted and the number of jobs created.

2.0 Application Caseload and Fees

- 2.1 The situation in Bury has been mixed and given the fact that there is no 'national trend' forecasting remains very difficult in the current climate. The Benchmarking work carried out in 2011 has, however, started to give us a better insight into producing forecasts and this is something that will be developed during 2012/12. The number of applications received in 2011/12 was down 5% to 1,245 and the fees were also down by 8% at £403,852.
- 2.2 The staffing of the Development Management team currently comprises 5 (fte) Planning Officers (qualified to RTPPI standard), and 2 (fte), Assistant Planning Officers and a Planning Technician with relevant membership of the RTPPI 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 2.5 Support Officers. During the year we have taken on responsibility for Applications to protected trees and some 70 applications have been processed during the year, all being dealt with within 20 working days.
- 2.3 Part of the work of the team also involves handling Appeals against the decisions of the Council on planning applications and a separate report is being prepared for the May PCC on performance on that matter.

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. (2011/12 figures in brackets)

	Target	No. of decisions	No. decided within target	% within target
Majors	60% within 13 weeks	33(30)	26 (33)	78.79% (86%)
Minors	65% within 8 weeks	251(303)	246 (274)	88.05% (90%)
Others	80% within 8 weeks	699(805)	699(782)	94.85% (97%)

- 3.1 The speed of performance in respect of Committee decisions is understandably below the set targets and was 50% (56%) in 2011/12.
- 3.2 The percentage of all decisions which have been delegated to officers has fallen slightly to 90.5% (91%). This is now at the bottom end of the averages for Councils many authorities have now hit figures of 98%. Currently from the benchmarking work carried out 95% 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.

4.1 The year has seen a number of developments and changes both internally and externally and we intended to amend the way that we report on performance on in future:

4.2 Externally:

- The NPPF (National Planning Policy Framework) has now been published and following representations many of the most problematic issues appear to have been removed from the draft.
- Local Fees Setting has not progressed and as such the rate payers of Bury have to subsidise most types of application.
- 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 2011/12 some 202 (189 - 2010/11) 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 and as mentioned above 70 applications for works to protected trees were also processed.
- During 2012/13 a new regulatory regime is to be introduced for Sustainable Urban Drainage and the processing of these applications will be handled by the technical team.

4.3 Internally:

- A major piece of work has been undertaken in a national benchmarking exercise looking at the operation of the Development Management Process. As a result of this we now have a complete overview of how the service operated, what areas we need to improve upon and where we spend money. This has led to a review of payments to other teams in the authority and will result in a more equitable use of scarce resources.
- As part of the Plan for Change one vacant post of a planning officer has now been deleted as the 0.5% of a technical officer's post.
- A new SPD 1 on Recreational provision has been introduced and now payments are required for ALL new residential properties.
- Training of PCC members is now held internally and sessions are arranged before the monthly PCC's.

4.4 Proposed changes to measuring performance:

- A new measure is to be introduced to look at the qualitative improvements that the service brings to the development process and these measures will include the following:
 - Number of jobs created in new commercial developments approved in Bury
 - Total investment in improvements to residential properties in Bury
 - Performance in terms of customer satisfaction

4.3 The report will now be produced on a bi-annual basis at the April and October PCC's.

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 despite the slight fall on previous years 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 Day of Action and continued attacks on the Planning Service by central government politicians.
- 5.3 There continues to be a range of work in the section which is over and above the actual applications which are processed. The introduction of the NPPF, Localism and (hopefully) Local Fees Setting will have particular challenges for the rest of 2012/13 and for the foreseeable future and the PCC will be kept informed of changes that arise as a result.
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List of Background Papers:- None

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