

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Portfolio Holder for Growth and Sustainable Communities / Planning Services Portfolio Holder
14th May 2008

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Planning and Sustainable Communities: End of year Performance Report

Purpose

1. To update the PFH on performance against the service plan

Performance in Respect of our Current Service Plan:

- **Development Control**
2. The Team Leaders and senior posts have all been appointed. The recruitment process is now going forward to short list candidates to fill the 4 vacant posts in Development Control (i.e. all the senior posts have been filled internally). Once the teams have settled in we will be able to introduce the Duty Officer system (N.B. a duty officer system has already been introduced to help with registration following the introduction of 1 App).
 3. The DC section needs to continue to meet the BVI targets set by Government for determining planning applications within specified target dates. In the recent past, failure to meet the targets has carried with it the risk of being identified as a standards authority and smaller amounts of Planning Delivery Grant. For the coming year, it is possible that the Council could be “fined” for not meeting its targets.
 4. At the end of the financial year, the current situation in relation to selected Development Control BVI targets is as follows:

Type of application	Target set by Gov. for 07 - 08	Actual 07-08	Comparative 06-07
Major BV 109a	60% in 13 weeks	78%	84%
Minor BV 109b	65% in 8 weeks	73%	70%
Others BV 109c	80% in 8 weeks	88%	84%
% appeals allowed BV 204	36%	37%	33%
	Internal Target	Actual performance to 03/03/08	06/07
% planning applicants satisfied BV111	To be set	74%	57%

% Delegated to officers	90%	94%	91%
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5. Given that these have been achieved in advance of the change and without one of the four principal officers for the whole period this is an encouraging performance that reflects well on the staff concerned.
6. The improvements in respect of minors and others and decline in the majors reflects a slight change in emphasis in terms of priorities to ensure that we were more comfortably ahead of the targets across the board and to maximise our Planning Delivery Grant payment. However the reward targets seem almost certain to change for the current year with the emphasis on progress on the Local Delivery Framework and housing completions relative to historic rates.
7. The percentage delegated has increased in accordance with what Government perceives as best practice. In particular, the new Planning Committee has been significant in achieving this, and many of the new practices have been welcomed (in particular the right to speak). This has not however, come without some concerns being raised by Parishes about the changes to the Chairman's delegation protocol, that were essential if the Planning Committee was to work better. As a first step, Parishes' are now being sent copies of the relevant reports and these should satisfy them that all the issues they have raised have been taken into account. Further our new initiative of a parish Panel, due to start in June, will provide a forum for common concerns to be aired and resolved.
8. In meeting the targets, less time is spent on other parts of the service, the most obvious of which is the response time to informal enquiries. Figures reported for the last three quarters show performance below the corporate customer service standards requiring a response within 10 working days. However, there has been a distinct improvement and this may reflect the additional time that officers have now that the benefits of the registration team are being experienced i.e. unless there are staff shortages, a working file is now available to officers within 3 working days instead of up to 3 weeks. Another factor is the work to reduce the size of the Planning Committee agendas and the Committee processes, and this has freed up additional officer time that can be committed to service delivery.
9. There are differences within the teams and addressing these to spread good practice will be one of the priorities for the new team leaders. The figures for the final quarter for the year will be available for the next PFH meeting. The relative performance over the last three quarters is as shown below:

% Informals replied to within 10 workings days	Area 1	Area 2	Area 3	Area 4	Overall
1 st Quarter	36	84	84	45	57
2 nd Quarter	60	87	88	61	74
3 rd Quarter	66	70	96	76	76
4 th Quarter	tbc	tbc	tbc	tbc	tbc

10. In addition, the customer satisfaction rate declined at the last tri-annual survey. To help improve satisfaction an agents' user panel has been set up, and the first three meetings with positive feedback. The next meeting will feature details of the new charging regime

11. Every three years, planning authorities are required to survey customer satisfaction and the result last year was that 57% were satisfied with service they received. In order to be able to have an idea of the impact of our improvements we are now sampling customer satisfaction, and in the latest quarter, we have increased the % surveyed. The results of the last two quarters of 2007-08 have been analysed and, and the current running total (with a month remaining) has further improved from 63% for the first quarter to 75% for the half year. Clearly there is a lot more to be done but the improvement is encouraging and it's to be hoped that the changes in hand will lead to further improvements.
12. With regard to the Major Growth, the review of lessons to be learnt is underway and is now being supported by the Task and Finish Group set up by Scrutiny to look at the lessons learnt from the Arbury development. The first draft report has been published and work continues apace with a walk around of the Arbury by the Members and a visit scheduled to meet with officers at Huntingdonshire D.C. to be briefed on a development that has been cited as an example of best practice by the developers at the Arbury.
13. The new joint Committees are in place, and the first approval resolved to be granted at Trumpington, and the terms of the 106 requirements agreed. The Northstowe application has been submitted, and following the extensive public consultation exercise, the first critic of the proposal sent to the applicants.

- **Conservation**

14. The main area of slippage reflects staffing issues especially in the area of conservation, and this was shown in the review document considered at the last PFH meeting. The staffing situation had substantially been addressed, with the appointment of the new Head of the Design & Conservation section (Glen Richardson), and he was due to start in mid February. However, the difficulties of recruiting and bringing into the area new urban designers, has prompted a rethink as to how urban design can be provided across the sub-region and from this review, a joint urban design team is to be set up with the City and County. Glen has now been appointed to the new post, and adverts are in the process of being placed to fill the vacant urban design posts.
15. By the time of the PFH meeting interviews will have taken place to fill the vacant post of Design and Conservation team leader and the soon to be vacant, Conservation Architect.
16. it is hoped that I will have some positive news to report when we meet.

- **Policy**

17. Most of the work program has been completed on time, and where not, this has primarily stemmed from external factors such as the requirements of the plan inspectors. The section continues to be on top of the challenging agenda set by Government in respect of plan preparation. The biggest new challenge is to consider how the housing shortfall can be best met, taking forward the Gypsy and Travellers Development Plan document, and our response to the possibility on an Eco-town at Hanley Grange

- **Building Control**

18. Most of the targets have been met, as have the actions. However, the staff resource is relatively light and so there is very little slack to deal with unplanned occurrences. Next years' aim will be to grow the business, especially in the area of the major developments which have traditionally been cherry picked by the approved inspectors
19. In addition to involvement with the Agents Panel, a separate user group has been set up with the relevant agents. An accompanying report maps out a possible incoming generating proposal.

- **Affordable Housing**

20. The effects of the new plan led system are now coming into force and the % agreed at Trumpington at 40%, is in accordance with our requirements.

Summary

21. All the direction of travel trends are positive, but there is still a considerable amount of work to be done to meet our commitments the Government's agenda and SCDC's aimed at improving service performance and public satisfaction with development control. A key factor will be retaining and recruiting staff with the necessary skills.

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