



Report To: Planning Portfolio Holder
Lead Officer: Director of Planning and New Communities

18 November 2014

Six-Month Performance Report including update on Planning Improvement Project

Purpose

1. To provide information on performance to 30 September 2014.
2. This is not a key decision but has been brought to this meeting for information.

Recommendations

3. It is recommended that the Portfolio Holder note the report.

Reasons for Recommendations

4. This report includes performance statistics (Appendix 1), and an update on the Planning Service including the Improvement Project.

Background

5. There are a set of key performance measures that are monitored and reviewed monthly, and reported to the Portfolio Holder meeting every six months. The measures include applications received, number of 'open cases', and proportion of applications determined in target time.
6. In July 2013, the Portfolio Holder endorsed the Development Control Improvement Plan and its project arrangements.

Considerations

Performance Indicators

7. A summary of performance across the department is attached as Appendix 1.
8. From 1 April – 30 September, 950 planning applications were received and validated compared to 929 for the same period in 2013. For the same periods, decisions have been made for 1017 applications, compared to 895 for the same period last year (an increase of 122). The number of 'open cases' has remained high, although it has reduced from a high point of 585 in June to 546 at 30 September.
9. The proportion of applications determined in target time is below target for all cases except 'large majors'. This is due, in part, to staff turnover, where cases have been passed to other planning officers to complete and therefore taken additional time.
10. In June, two planning appeals for housing sites in Waterbeach confirmed that the Council does not have a five year land supply. This means that the Council cannot

rely on certain of its housing-related planning policies and, as a consequence, is receiving enquiries and planning applications for unallocated sites that are outside village frameworks. Such applications are being monitored at each stage through pre-application to determination; and the applicant is asked to agree that local members should be informed at pre-application stage. Such applications include proposals for schemes in Waterbeach, Foxton, Melbourn and Barrington.

11. Six applications for large solar farms have been submitted this year, and generated over £400,000 more income than originally estimated. Additional planning officer and other posts have been approved, funded from the additional income arising from solar farms and pre-application fees for strategic sites. These posts are being advertised and include 3 experienced planning officers and a technical support officer. The additional staff should help to deal with the rise in complex applications including potential appeals, and help to improve overall performance.
12. Future performance reports will include information about pre-applications, the number received and the timeliness of response. In September, improved management systems were introduced that included acknowledging all pre-application submissions, the allocated planning officer contacting the agent to agree the timescale and understand the agent's key concerns or questions for each pre-application. The changes were introduced as part of the Planning Improvement Plan and in response to clear feedback from planning agents. This new approach is being monitored to ensure an effective service is being provided.

Planning Improvement Project Phase 1 Implementation

13. As part of phase one of the Planning Improvement Project, guidelines for and a new way of consulting with internal services is being finalised. This is intended to simplify and speed up the process. The format of the neighbour letter is being revised with help from the Communications Team. The aim is to have a shorter and clearer letter. These changes will be in place by 1 January 2015.
14. The Duty Officer will continue to answer informal enquiries but in addition, improved information will be added on the website. We will strengthen sign-posting to the Planning Portal, and make this available in South Cambridgeshire Hall reception area. The overall period for updating the website will be around three months, as the team will work through the whole department.
15. We will continue to provide verbal advice on Permitted Development rights through the Duty Officer. Residents wishing to receive written advice, on whether their proposal constitutes Permitted Development, will be asked to submit an application for a Certificate of Lawfulness. This has the benefit of providing a formal written decision for customers with agreed timescales.
16. The Scheme of Delegation is currently being updated. It was endorsed by Planning Committee on 5th November 2014 and will be considered by Full Council later this month. A more extensive review will be carried out during 2015.

Planning Improvement Project Phase 2

17. Phase two of the Planning Improvement Project is at the scoping and investigation stage. The project is on target and has presented interim findings which will be refined and translated into an implementation plan for January 2015 onwards. The interim recommendations include:

- Need for more structured procedures with clear milestones which set out what is expected and by when, for example, complete site visit by week 3
- Allocation of applications & pre-application cases daily
- More 'proactive' management including each officer to have 30mins/weekly case review with Team leader.
- A central support team which works across the department and also registers and validates all applications.(Validation function to move from professional planning staff to technical support staff to help 'free up' time for planning officers)
- Pre-application advice to be 'signed off' by Team Leaders.
- Planning Committee de-briefs to bring greater awareness/knowledge of key cases across the department
- Importance of a document management system as part of IT system
- Continued programme of staff training and skills development.

Successful Funding Bids

18. The Council successfully bid for Site Delivery Fund, and has been granted £50,000 over two years. The Fund's objective is to facilitate the start-on-site of major housing applications. The funding will be used bring forward recruitment of a Business Excellence Manager and project officer. Their roles will be to strengthen programme management of major applications, and drive the development of a business-like culture matching the needs of the customer to work programmes with appropriate fees and time allocation.
19. The Council has been accepted as one of eleven councils in the Right to Build Vanguard Programme. The key requirements of the programme are to establish a register for people interested in self-build or custom-build, and also to establish a register for landowners wishing to offer serviced plots or shell-finish homes. The programme has a steering group that includes the Directors of Housing and Planning and New Communities, and a project officer is being recruited. Cambridge City Council is a partner in this project. An extract from the bid submission is attached to summarise key features of the project.

Options

20. No options are proposed.

Implications

21. In the writing of this report, taking into account financial, legal, staffing, risk management, equality and diversity, climate change, community safety and any other key issues, the following implications have been considered: -

Financial

22. There are costs arising from the use of temporary staff including the use of Urban Vision, and from recruiting new posts. The costs of temporary staff and Urban Vision are being covered by savings from vacant posts. The costs of new posts are covered from fees for planning performance agreements and solar farm applications.
23. The Council has been awarded £50,000 through the Site Delivery Fund, with £30,000 granted 2014/15, and £20,000 2015/16; and also £50,000 through the Right to Build Programme.

Staffing

24. The Council's recruitment policy and practice will be followed for the appointment of staff. The vacancies offer opportunities for internal progression for existing talent and also recruitment of new staff.

Consultation responses (including from the Youth Council)

25. No consultation has been carried out for this report.

Effect on Strategic Aims

Aim 1 – Engage with residents, parish and businesses to ensure we deliver first class services and value for money.

The aim of the Planning Service is to deliver customer focussed services in a timely manner ensuring high quality outcomes.

Background Papers

Where [the Local Authorities \(Executive Arrangements\) \(Meetings and Access to Information\) \(England\) Regulations 2012](#) require documents to be open to inspection by members of the public, they must be available for inspection: -

- (a) at all reasonable hours at the offices of South Cambridgeshire District Council;
- (b) on the Council's website; and
- (c) in the case of documents to be available for inspection pursuant to regulation 15, on payment of a reasonable fee required by the Council by the person seeking to inspect the documents at the offices of South Cambridgeshire District Council.

End of Year Performance Report to Planning and Economic Development Portfolio Holder on
11 June 2014

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