

Report to Planning Committee 23.6.21 - Appendix B – Officer Recommendations (from the Planning Review)

Officers						
No.	Recommendation from Review	Comment (RAG Rated)	Officer(s) To Action	Cost Implications	Timescales	Comments
1	The Director of Place should progress the implementation of an Improvement Plan and Officer/Member Training Plan, ensuring that all recommendations are implemented in accordance with a clear programme within 2 years.	Noted. First step is to agree what actions are required and then put timescales and resource requirements to them.	(KR)	None directly arising from this recommendation .	All actions to be completed by Jan 2023.	
2	The Group Head of Planning should be given responsibility for the transformational change of the Planning Service	The Group Head of Planning will have overall responsibility for this action.	(NC)	None directly arising from this recommendation .	All actions to be completed by Jan 2023.	
3	The leadership and management responsibilities within the service should be clearly defined.	Existing job descriptions and delegation authorities are agreed. However, we must be clear about expectations in terms of what staff should be dealing with themselves. The Group Head of Planning will set out expectations for managers around taking responsibility without the need to seek agreement of the Group Head.	(NC)	None directly arising from this recommendation .	May 2021	These will not be published and will be confidential.

4	The Director of Place may benefit from external support to deliver these recommendations.	The CEO will agree with the Director of Place any external support required	(NL)	Unknown at this time	2021 start	
5	In order to develop leadership and management skills within the service area; provide mentoring and/or training as set out in a Training Plan for managers at all levels of the Service relating to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Vision b. Leadership c. Role and responsibility d. Culture e. performance management f. effective decision making g. effective sickness absence management 	There are some over-arching principles that can be defined for the management of the Department around these subjects that can be agreed and signed up to collectively. Investigation will need to take place on whether further training is required to re-enforce these as well as sourcing a budget if further bespoke training is required. Some work has already been done on these around performance and sickness; two areas where significant improvements have been made. HR have confirmed that there has been effective sickness absence management, both in terms of short and long-term cases. The new VIP appraisal tool will be used to assist, and some additional training provided.	(NC)		This will sit side by side with the progress on the structure work in the Dept. Some of these matters have already been addressed. Specifically e, f & g.	The new VIP Appraisal tools will help enormously in being able to re-enforce this culture.
6	The Director of Place should engage the Service area more fully in the development of a vision for	1. Vision – refer back to what is already in business plan (linked to 5 above). Consult with	(KR)	None	June 21	

	its future, ensure it is effectively delivered, including considering alternative service delivery models.	Staff and Lead members 2. Alternative delivery models - prepare a report for consideration by Members	(KR)	Might require consultancy support if members decide to proceed beyond initial consideration of issue.	Dec 21	
7	In order to make the Business Planning Process more robust and challenging the Service should be engaged in the development of a Business Plan with clearer and more ambitious targets	Updated performance management targets are currently being discussed. These will relate to service delivery targets as the corporate targets reflect those of central government. It should be noted that, at the time of the review, the total number of applications being dealt with was approximately 25% lower. There has been a significant increase in the number of applications since February 2021.	(KR/NC)	None	June 21	To be incorporated into the next Business Plan. Historically, Officers have used average determination times as a target. This was because we have been suffering from vacant posts for a long time. This is not the case so much currently, and that these targets need amending as they do not accord with the statutory % targets.
8	Implement a Service Communication Strategy to improve top-down and bottom-up communication within the service regarding the Business Plan, performance, personnel issues and training and includes regular meetings for all parts of the service.	A strategy will be developed.	(NC)	None	June 21	Common expectations will be set out and these will form part of the regular 1-1 meetings throughout the department. The VIP system will assist greatly in this.

9	Create a culture of active performance management that is in line with the rest of the Council, with managers at all levels of the Planning Service taking responsibility, including the implementation of a series of regular application performance review meetings.	<p>There has been significant progress on performance, and Managers have made interventions when performance was not being maintained. As part of roles/responsibilities, Team Leaders will be reminded of the necessity to have a comprehensive 5-week meeting to discuss cases, to discuss more cases with the Group Head and to specifically discuss performance on a quarterly basis.</p> <p>There is a need to better understand why applications are not determined in time, especially delegated decisions. Investigate producing a short pro-forma to understand the reasons.</p> <p>We can also publish our protocol on how we will determine planning applications and when/if we will negotiate or determine. Director of Place to consider anything different when reporting performance.</p>	<p>(NC)</p> <p>(NC)</p> <p>(NC)</p> <p>(NC)</p> <p>(KR)</p>	<p>None</p> <p>None</p> <p>None</p>	<p>No end date</p> <p>Commenced. Aim for first survey in Q2 to avoid conflict with current upgrading to IT system.</p> <p>Done</p> <p>April 21</p>	<p>There is on-going monitoring of existing processes to ensure performance is maintained/improved.</p>
10	The Director of Place should provide clear guidance for the frequency of team meetings, to be	Linked to 5 and 8				

	assessed as part of the annual appraisal process.					
11	Performance appraisals and one-to-one performance and management meetings should be carried out in accordance with Council guidance and policies, with agendas provided for formal management meetings. Action points should be noted and reviewed at subsequent meetings.	Appraisals are carried out for the service in the same way as for all other services. Completions are monitored both in the service and corporately. Quarterly performance meetings with individual officers to discuss performance have already been established, in addition to the regular meetings with Team leaders. Process to be continually evolved. Use to be made on new VIP appraisal process.	(NC)	None	Ongoing but check that new system is being used effectively in second part of 2021.	New VIP system will help embed this
12	Incorporate stretching performance targets within performance appraisals to ensure that individuals to take responsibility for their performance.	Completed. The targets that were included will form the basis of quarterly performance review meetings with officers and team leaders.	(NC)	None	Ongoing	PDR's contain performance targets. Although each officer has bespoke targets, unfortunately, some PDR's have not contained these specific targets and this needs to be rectified.
13	The Director of Place should continue to provide appropriate counselling, mediation and mentoring where required.	This is already done, but will be kept under review.	(KR/NC)	Any external costs to be funded from service or corporate budgets.	Ongoing	No further action required.

14	<p>Staff structure should be reviewed to create a better and more efficient service, identifying and focussing on the key issues facing the service which should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Driving transformational change b. Improving performance c. Improving quality of service delivery 	<p>This has not progressed as well as it should have for a number of reasons.</p> <p>Business case to be completed for changes, which will include the aims of the review of structure.</p>	(NC)	There is a need for external support to progress this.	June 21 for presentation of new structure to CMT New structure in place following consultation and funding by July 22	External assistance is required, in order for this to progressed in a timely manner.
15	Review the planning application validation process, set ambitious targets for improving the speed of validation and consider consolidating validation either all in-house or all outsourced.	<p>This has been done incrementally over time. A wholesale review of the reasons that applications has taken invalidated place and resulted in a new validation checklist being published. Work should be carried out with the whole team to discuss measures which can be introduced to improve the speed of validation and the quality of what is submitted to the Council.</p>	(NC)	None	Dec 21	
16	The validation team workload should be organised to ensure they prioritise validation over other tasks.	This happens already.	(NC)			No further action required.

17	Set out process guidance for the determination of planning applications that will deliver speedier decision making, a lower active case load and better customer service; by clearly setting out the critical path for the assessment and determination of an application, which should include clear guidance regarding when to negotiate amendments and when to re-consult on amended plans and additional information.	This has been done. Linked to 9 above.	(NC)	None	Done.	See 9 above. We have now published our guidance on how applications will be determined. This has been an internal instruction for a couple of years and officers need to abide by this guidance much more because there are still too many examples of applications being with undetermined for too long. As part of this, a comprehensive 5-week review by Team Leaders is critical.
18	Manage the use of Extensions of Time agreements to deliver best practice and improve customer service.	This is being done already. They should be the exception, not the norm. To be reviewed at the end of each quarter	(NC)	None	ongoing	No further action required.
19	Officers delegated and Committee reports should be reviewed to make them more concise, readable and to improve their grammatical accuracy and professional quality.	The criticism here relates to a couple of cases where the report had to be withdrawn from committee due to errors. Overall, quality of finished reports is of a relatively high standard. There is a balance to be struck between providing succinct report and making sure that all the key issues are addressed.		None	Dec 21	NC will work to review the report templates. NC will also seek to tackle persistent quality issues. These issues do not result in poor reports being put to PC, but reports take far too long to make changes/corrections and the quality of reports in

		Case law in this field continues to evolve. Member preference is for reports to be as comprehensive as possible. Action is to review length and structure of reports.	(NC)			the first instance, needs to significantly improve.
20	Ocella review project should be completed quickly to ensure that an effective, up to date system is in place. The Director of Place & Group Head of Planning should review progress and additional resources should be allocated if necessary to ensure the completion of the project.	We are currently on schedule to have this completed by mid-April 2021. Future staff resourcing issues are being considered under 14 above. A new procurement exercise will need to start within 18 months.	(NC)	None directly arising from this recommendation .	April 21	
21	The Group Head of Planning should meet with his service as a whole more regularly.	Group Head of Planning meets with all teams regularly - every week or two. Group Head will set up departmental meetings	(NC)	None	May 2021	These have been arranged and will take place every 3-4 months and teams will be able to update each other as well as the GH providing updates on certain matters.
22	Individual training plans should be incorporated within each Officer's annual appraisal to support their continued professional development.	There are systems already in place to ensure that individual training needs are picked up through the PDR process. There may be some opportunities for training for the whole department as we have	(NC)	None	Ongoing	No further action required.

		recently had with the Design Guide. Further, current apprentices receive full training to enable them to become able to do the job.				
23	The Group Head of Planning should develop a service training package to include a variety of training measures such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Joint Member Officer training/workshop sessions b. In-house training sessions c. External training d. A mentoring programme for Officers e. Lunchtime learning sessions. 	As 22. Team leaders identify training needs within PDR's and this is then co-ordinated to see if there are common areas. The department has also recently undertaken training (delivered internally) on matters such as Heritage and Flood Risk. External training will require additional budgets.	(NC)	External training and mentoring will require a larger training budget for officers.	Ongoing	No further action required.
24	Develop a recruitment and retention strategy that includes a comparison with neighbouring and/or comparable authorities.	This has been done for the past 5-6 years. It is therefore unclear why the report author has included this recommendation.	(NC)		Done	No further action required.
25	The retention payment should be reviewed as part of a recruitment and retention strategy and, if continued, linked to individual performance.	In agreement the market supplements for 21/22, CMT have sought to consider these to be linked to performance in future years.	(NC)		CMT considered in March 21	NC to devise a PRP structure for potential implementation in 22/23 as an alternative to the Market Supplements.

26	An effective sickness absence management strategy should continue to be implemented by the Group Head of Planning, in accordance with the Council's policies and procedures.	It is implemented in accordance with Council policy. We may need some robust decisions on long term absence that are supported by HR. Short term sickness absence has radically reduced in recent years, simply though applying the Council policies.	(NC)		Nothing specific required. On-going monitoring.	No further action required.
27	Customer satisfaction levels should be measured by: a. carrying out an annual customer service survey of applicants, agents and Members of the public who comment on planning applications b. carrying out an annual customer service survey of Members of the public who submit enforcement complaints and those investigated by the service c. the Planning Service taking part in the annual	This was undertaken for several years up until 2014-15 and which point it was agreed corporately it would be dropped. The reason this decision was made was because of the poor level of response. We were issuing up to 2000 surveys per year but in the last year of operation we only had about 50 returns. A new approach will be considered Agents Forum are held to update agents on current issues. Set up an annual	(NC)	Not known at this time None	2021/22	June 2021

	<p>Council satisfaction survey</p> <p>d. holding an annual agents forum which provides the opportunity for agents to provide customer service feedback</p>	meeting to discuss feedback on service.				
28	There should be a clear Planning Service Charter that sets out what a customer may expect when they visit, email, write a letter or telephone the Planning Service.	We have a customer access strategy for the Council.	No action			No further action required.
29	Hold regular meetings between the Administration/Technical Team and Development Management to discuss improvement/quality issues.	This already happens in virtually every 1-1 with the TSU team leader.	(DM Team Leaders)			DM Officers and TSU Team Leader to meet regularly to discuss validation issues with the aim to improve quality of submissions.
30	Review customer guidance regarding how to submit an application and consider introducing a handling fee for returned invalid applications.	Would welcome this if there is an identified need and legal.	(NC)		July 21	
31	Improve flexible and mobile working, self-service by customers and phase out the use of paper and reduce printing in		(NC)		End of 21	

	<p>accordance with the Council's digital agenda:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Cease the use of paper files b. Cease printing plans for Town and Parish Councils (T&PCs) c. Any consultees that do not currently self-serve or use email for consultations should be strongly encouraged to do so d. Amend guidance on the Planning web pages to discourage customers from sending in letters or hard copy applications e. Amend guidance on the Planning web pages to encourage the submission of application representations or enforcement complaints via online forms f. Review the word limit for online representations 	<p>Group Head has been trying to do this for a long time, but has had resistance. Covid has meant that officers have been working without paper files for over a year without any issues. Preference would be for all consultation responses to only be received electronically. It will be difficult to deliver on this recommendation if members are not willing to sign up to it as well.</p>				<p>Officers already work from electronic files only and we stopped sending paper copies of applications to Parish Council's a couple of years ago.</p> <p>Need to look at how we can encourage/require reps to be submitted electronically and setting up e forms on the website.</p>
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33	Review the use of conditions and review the standard conditions used.	This has been done regularly. All were fully updated in 2018. There is updating/amending on an ad-hoc basis as when needed.	(NC)	None	Ongoing	
34	Improve the relationship with T&PCs by holding regular meetings with their Clerks and the Councils (e.g. an annual forum)	We used to offer annual training for Parish's and discuss some issues at this meeting. But we have obviously not met for some time. This can be resurrected. We held a Parish seminar on 11 March (YEAR)??.	(NC)	None	Oct 21	Can discuss issues around recommendations 36 – 38 at this session. Need to discuss how annual training by external facilitator will be funded. See 35.
35	Provide training opportunities for T&PCs regarding material considerations, decision making, making representations, S106 etc to improve the relevance and quality of their representations.	As above.	(NC)	Funding will be required for this to be delivered.		
36	Where T&PC comments are not accepted, the officer's report should contain an appropriate explanation and when a decision is made contrary to their comments, the T&PCs should be sent a link to the report's online location to ensure they receive feedback.	Comments made by T&PC are always addressed in reports. Officer reports are on-line and all T&CP's get notified of decisions (and can access officer reports). It is not necessary as each feedback letter would be bespoke and would likely just repeat text from officer reports, creating a lot of unnecessary work. It	(NC)			No further action required.

		would create additional work with no benefit.				
37	Consider whether T&PCs can be sent an automated notification that a discharge of conditions application has been received.	T&PC's are all sent the weekly list which contains details of such applications.	(NC)			No further action required.
38	Provide information regarding S106 spend in each Ward/Parish to improve transparency.	This information is all already set out in heads of terms in officer reports for applications on strategic sites. All other decisions will be subject to CIL. We have an annual s106/CIL spending report (which we recently published - January 2021). There is also an Annual Infrastructure Spending Statement produced by ADC and each individual T&PC will need to produce one as well where they are spending CIL receipts.	(NC)			No further action required.
39	Produce a clear strategy to review made neighbourhood plans highlighting which neighbourhood plan policies have weight in light of the new local plan and which are redundant.	Can review the made Neighbourhood Plans to see which policies have full weight or reduced weight.	(NC)		Aug 21	
40	To deliver the major growth agenda will require	This needs to be investigated and there is potential for, for	(NC)		Summer 2022	

	stopping doing some things – in some low-risk areas having a “not perfect but good enough” approach.	example, a much more focussed compliance team whereby only significant issues are investigated. This recommendation appears to contradict other recommendations (see 36 – 38 as an example).				
41	Corporate project work needs to be aligned to help achieve local plan outcomes.	There have been some cases where other departments have failed to involve planning in generating proposals. Corporately, this needs to be much better.	(NC)			Unclear what action this recommendation is proposing or what specific issue needs to be resolved.
Joint Officer/Member						
60	Hold joint Member/Officer training sessions to improve Member/Officer relations and to develop a common understanding of each other’s roles and responsibilities.	Discuss scope and frequency of these with Chairman.	(NC)	Initial sessions are free but funding will be required to deliver some of this.		This has been done and will be on-going. Training has been arranged for 15 & 29 March initially. Future training has been agreed, but funding needs to be agreed before training can be set up. It is essential that future training is on matters to improve decision making, rather than forums for Members to be critical of consultees.
61	Hold joint Member/Officer workshops to review Member/Officer	Discuss scope and frequency of these with Chairman.	(NC)	Funding will be required	Autumn 21	

	relationships with an external facilitator.					
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