

ROTHERHAM METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

**To the Chairman and Members of the
PLANNING REGULATORY BOARD**

Date 2nd June 2016

Report of the Director of Planning, Regeneration and Culture Service

ITEM NO. SUBJECT

1 Development Management Performance Report 2015-2016

2 Planning Health check report

Item 1**Development Management Performance Report 2015-2016****Recommendation**

That the contents of the report be noted.

Background

The purpose of this report is to inform Members of the current performance of the Development Management team.

Facts and Figures

Performance statistics for Development Management (DM) are measured around the speed of decision making for the three different types of application categories (Major, Minor and Other). Nationally the Government has set minimum standards for the time allowed to deal with these types of applications. These are currently set at:

Government Targets

Major	60% of applications to be determined within 13 weeks
Minor	65% of applications to be determined within 8 weeks
Other	80% of applications to be determined within 8 weeks

As part of our continued improvement programme, DM has consistently surpassed these figures and continues to set itself high standard targets to ensure that the service is efficient, accountable and reflects our desire to achieve top quartile performance.

Type	2013 - 2014	2014 - 2015	2015 – 2016	Gov't Target
Major	91%	98%	100%	60%
Minor	85%	91%	99%	65%
Other	93%	98%	99%	80%

Performance on all three application types has exceeded targets for this year and has achieved top quartile performance based on last year's statistics. This represents a significant achievement across all three application types and demonstrates that the improvement measures incorporated into the daily workflow and the benefits of a fully electronic document management system have begun to have a positive effect.

It is important that we continue to monitor performance based on the speed of decision making as part of further planning reforms the Government has introduced a 26 week planning fee refund should applications not be determined within this period. They have also confirmed the introduction of the Planning Performance Guarantee

and 'Special Measures designation' enabling developers to bypass a Council and apply directly to the Planning Inspectorate for a planning permission for a Major Development, where that local authority has a track record of either poor performance in decision making or not acting positively to promote economic growth within its area

In addition, the new Housing and Planning bill that is currently being includes the provision for the processing of planning applications to be undertaken within a competitive environment. This will potentially open up the opportunity for private individuals, local firms and neighbouring Local Planning Authorities to compete to process planning applications within Rotherham which could significantly reduce the level of income that is collected through planning application fees. It is therefore vitally important that the Development Management service is as efficient and customer focussed as it can be.

Conclusion

Development Management has, like all other services within the Council, had to save money year on year and is now at a resource level that would struggle to maintain performance if it was cut further.

A considerable amount of work has been done to ensure that we are as efficient as possible and this has recently been recognised by the Planning Advisory Service in naming Rotherham as one of the 10 ten performing Local Planning Authorities but it is important that we continue to perform at this level due to the Governments' apparent desire to open up the processing of planning applications to a competitive market. We need to make sure that if this does happen that we are competitive and that given the choice of where to submit a planning application all of our customers would choose Rotherham.

Item 2

Planning Health check report

Recommendation:

That members consider the report and the action plan in relation to the Planning health check

Background

To ensure that Rotherham Council's Planning Service represented a good standard of service and value for money to local residents, a Local Government Association "health check" was carried out in October 2015.

The peer team were provided with key documentation which included a position statement, performance data, service plan, risk register, planning policy documents, growth strategy and staffing structures prior to carrying out on site interviews and workshops with key members, officers and partners. They also attended a Planning Board meeting.

The assessment of the service was based on the standard Planning Advisory Service criteria of what a good planning service looks like i.e.:-

What a good planning service looks like:-
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good working relations and processes between councillors and officers and planning and the corporate centre
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Councillors are well informed and active in engagements in promoting development and making decisions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good performance on major and minor application.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good working with applicants
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A good understanding of “live” application process
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A good understanding of planning service finance (income; fees, pre app, New Homes Bonus, Business Rates, S106, CIL)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An up to date local plan (NPPF compliant and probably not more than 5 years old)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good Partnership work: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Inside of the Council (planning supporting economic development, housing strategy, schools, transport, etc) ○ Housing Market Area/Sub regional area ○ With the development industry of the area

Summary results of the health check

“The health check found a good planning service, well lead, efficient, with good use of I.T., performing well against national performance measures. The service is well regarded by internal stakeholders and highly respected by developers. The service is on track to deliver Rotherham’s Local Plan within the timetables set and is ahead of others in the region.”

Strengths of the service were highlighted as:

- Good leadership and a culture of continuous improvement;
- Top quartile performance for dealing with planning applications;
- Quality decision making through flexibility and ability to deliver key sites e.g. Waverley;
- Paperless office approach - demonstrating efficiencies through I.T;
- Strong Planning Board with good reports, effective chairing and appropriate levels of delegation;
- Planning Policy work is recognised as the most advanced within the City Region and is on track to deliver a Local Plan sites and policies document during 2017;
- Highly respected service with interviews with customers providing a positive response.

Areas for consideration highlighted by the Health check:

- Consider creative ways of funding the service (increase income and source other funding)
- Invest in project management capacity to ensure delivery of key sites

- Further develop wider Council ownership of the Local Plan as a key part of the delivery of the growth agenda and consider how to promote delivery of the new sites.

Assessment and Action Plan

Detailed findings	Response	Actions
Working arrangements Positive approachable service, good cross service working, visible leadership, continuous improvement, staff satisfaction high	Include continuous improvement within annual Team Action Plans (TAP)	Embed in TAP
Performance. Top quartile performance. Good performance management and use of the Development Management (DM) approach – customer feedback and level of satisfaction supports this approach Further monitoring of validation of planning applications would be useful to monitor efficiencies and identify agents requiring support	Performance to be reported quarterly to Board Requirement to introduce additional monitoring to be discussed with the performance team	Performance report 6 month update report to Planning Board
Working with applicants DM is a highly regarded service – positive, flexible and helpful staff Good communication, with customers, with strong a digital focus was evidenced	Continue to develop I.T to improve access to services	Embed in TAP
Understanding of the application process Good investment in I.T which has improved efficiency	Continue to develop I.T systems	Embed in TAP

Maintenance of Pre-application records could be improved	Paid pre-application service has been adopted by the Council and implemented from 9 th May – this has formalised the service provided and a file / reference number is created for each pre-application enquiry and response	Review 6 months from implementation
Efficiencies to be created from the merging of Building Control and Planning	Building Control and Planning merged from 1 st April following a restructure across both teams	Review complete
Some risks to the service due to staffing capacity issues	Continue to monitor risk	Ensure risks are highlighted and monitored through TAP
Finance		
Cost of service understood and useful benchmarking carried out – full costs including corporate overheads could be made available	Further budget assessments to be carried out	Continue to monitor budget and benchmark with other authorities
S106 well managed but additional reporting of benefits achieved would be useful	Reporting arrangements for s106 to be reviewed during 2016/17	S106 monitoring to be completed for 6 monthly review
Member involvement in promoting development and making decisions		
Visible and energetic leadership from Cabinet member with commitment to improvement	Continue to develop good officer / member working arrangements – training sessions and events such as the completed development tour to be continued	Events to be programmed through TAPs
Chair and vice chair of Planning Board chaired the meeting well – good easy to read Board reports provided		

<p>Officer advice respected and scheme of delegation works well</p> <p>Members have an appropriate level of involvement</p> <p>Report queries the Right to Speak procedure (in relation to the number of objectors allowed to speak)</p> <p>Members role in understanding the key role that planning plays in the spatial elements of the growth agenda to be developed further Replacement for the Local Plan Steering Group</p> <p>Future involvement in CIL</p> <p>Communication with ward members re: “heads up” for contentious issues</p>	<p>Review Right to Speak at Planning Board procedures</p> <p>Member involvement in the Local Plan process and CIL to be reviewed with the Cabinet Member</p> <p>Case officers have been made aware of requirement to keep ward members informed</p>	<p>Review and report back on Right to speak and Local Plan processes (inc. CIL) via 6 monthly review report</p> <p>Review effectiveness after 6 months</p>
<p>Local Plan</p> <p>Adopted Core Strategy in place On track to deliver adopted Sites and Policies Document in 2017</p> <p>Ongoing work and commitment to deliver aims and objectives – internal focus on growth and working with partners to deliver development on sites</p>	<p>Positive feedback on progress but risk highlighted in relation to future capacity</p>	<p>Review workload and staffing levels following completion of sites and policies work</p>
<p>Partnership working</p> <p>Positive feedback on work with partners. Waverley highlighted as a good example – need to ensure sufficient resources in place to ensure a similar project managed approach taken to deliver other key sites e.g Bassingthorpe Farm.</p>	<p>Continue to work with partners. Assess need to resource delivery of key sites to achieve local plan targets</p>	<p>Review workloads following Sites Examination in public</p>

Conclusion

The table summarises each of the areas assessed, gives a response to the comments made and highlights any necessary actions. Some of the actions will be caught up in a 6 monthly review and brought back to Planning Board in the form of an update report.

In relation to the more strategic comments regarding the future of the Planning Service i.e. income streams, ensuring there is adequate capacity to deliver the Local Plan targets and gaining more corporate support for the delivery of this growth this will be considered as part of service planning for this year and also fed back in update reports.