



## **Report to Cabinet**

**Subject: Audit Commission Inspection Report on Planning Service**

**Author: M D Stevenson - Head of Planning and Environment**

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Members will be aware that Planning Services have been the subject of an Audit Commission Inspection, the results of which have now been received. A copy of the Inspection Report and News Release are attached for information.

The planning services (Local Plans, Development Control and Building Control) were assessed as being “fair” but “uncertain to improve”.

Whilst the Inspectors recognised that certain aspects of the service have improved recently (speed of determination of planning applications and delivery of community benefits through developer contributions) the lack of links between community, corporate and service level plans – the fact that there is no up-to-date statutory Local Plan and the fact that responsiveness of Building Control and handling of planning applications has suffered as a result of increased workloads, all counted against the service.

Recommendations made by the Inspectors will now be taken on board and fed into the production of an improvement plan together with other matters identified by the self-assessments carried out as part of the current Best Value Review of the planning service.

The final action plan addressing both the recommendations of the Best Value Review and the Audit Commission Inspection Report will be brought back to Cabinet in due course following agreement by the Portfolio holder for Planning.

Members will recall that the Inspection arose as a consequence of the Council being designated a planning standards authority. At that time a comprehensive improvement plan was developed and submitted to the ODPM earlier this year. It should be noted that the actions within that plan have either been achieved (increased resources, speed of determination of planning applications) or are already in progress (IT developments). As such the targets set for achieving upper quartile response times for determining planning applications were achieved ahead of schedule and have been

maintained since that date. Implementation of the remaining items will also see a significant increase in the Service's Pendleton assessment and other relevant national planning performance indicators.

Despite this improvement it is recognised that further work needs to be undertaken to ensure that the service continues to improve and to ensure that the Inspector's assessment of uncertain to improve is addressed. The detailed action plan being prepared will address this aspect along with the other service quality issues outlined in the report.

This will be the subject of a further report to the Best Value Review Scrutiny Group in due course.