



**Report to: Cabinet**

**Subject : Planning Services Improvement Plan**

**Date: 6<sup>th</sup> September 2007**

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### Introduction

In March 2007 the Borough Council commissioned a 'critical friend' peer review of Planning Services. The purpose of this was to record the improvements the service had seen achieved since the previous Audit Commission inspections, and to highlight any further areas for improvement.

The review undertook extensive interviews with officers, members, stakeholders and users of the service.

In June the final report was published, which highlighted extensive areas of good practice, as well as issues for consideration and recommendations. In response to this an action plan has been drafted.

### Planning Improvement Plan

The review report (attached) makes a number of points under the following headings;

Leadership and Corporate Engagement  
Customer Focus and Community Engagement  
Achieving outcomes effectively and sustainably  
People, Performance and Resource Management

The issues for consideration and recommendations within these headings include;

- Encouraging the role of councillors in policy development
- Strengthening the role of scrutiny
- Developing a service plan

- Improve the transparency and understanding of the planning decision making process
- Review the role of the delegation panel
- Publicise and monitor service standards
- Review the evidence base of the LDF Core Strategy
- Formalise the s106 process
- Cascade service priorities into individual PDRs

The improvement plan seeks to answer these and, where appropriate, develop actions in response to them. These are included in a time table which reflects the importance of the nature of the recommendation, the impact it is likely to have on the quality of the service, and the resources available to carry out the necessary actions. It is intended that the improvement plan is monitored on a regular basis and, if necessary, reviewed to reflect changing priorities.

Several of the actions have already been implemented, especially those relating to the Local Development Framework which were given high priority. SMT has also noted the content of the Improvement Plan and have agreed the establishment of a working group to review member training, including parish councils.

### Conclusions

The peer review presents a very positive picture of the Planning Section and the way the service has recently improved. It also has identified a number of areas where further improvements could be made, in particular those with regards to the emerging Core Strategy and the evidence base that should be based upon. These suggestions are taken up in the improvement plan and in a number of cases, including the Core Strategy, have already been acted upon. There are other areas which could benefit from further attention and the improvement plan sets out a timetable for doing so.

### Recommendations

That Cabinet note the content of the Peer Review Report, and adopt the Planning Improvement Plan.