

Report to Planning Committee

Subject: Development Management Improvement Plan

Date: 14 October 2015

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1. Purpose of the Report

- To seek members' comments on the draft Development Management Improvement Plan, produced following the recent independent service review.

2. Background

Members will recall that a short independent resource review of the Development Management service was carried out by Fortismere Associates and ARUP in the Spring and early Summer of 2015 on behalf of the Planning Advisory Service. It was the first review of its type in the country.

Drawing on the findings of that review, and on wider evidence and issues relating to current performance of the service, a draft Improvement Plan has now been drawn up. A copy of the draft plan is attached at **Appendix A**.

3. Proposal

The Resource Review identified a number of areas for improvement which need to be addressed

- Lack of management capacity in the existing structure
- Not meeting corporate targets on “minor” and “other” categories of planning applications
- Increasing proportion of non-fee earning applications
- Opportunities to charge for services on full cost recovery basis
- Improve communication and customer experience
- Improve the use of ICT

The draft Improvement Plan has been developed to address these issues and wider points derived from customer, member, employee and other stakeholder feedback.

The Improvement Plan is themed around delivering improvement across a range of themes.

- Strategic overview
- Staffing, including leadership and management
- Systems and process improvements
- Performance management and improvement
- Income generation
- Customer care and customer focus
- Democratic improvements

It is a challenging programme, to be delivered over a two year period. In some areas, it requires significant, cultural change.

Delivery of the programme will be led by the Service Manager, but will require support from all officers within the service going forward. Frequent staff briefings will seek to ensure continued staff engagement with and ownership of the Plan. Officer oversight will be co-ordinated by the Corporate Director responsible for Planning.

It is also felt to be important that there is member oversight of delivery of the Plan. It is therefore proposed that a small Member Reference Group is established to provide such oversight, advised and supported by the Corporate Director and the Service Manager.

If supported, it is suggested that this reference group consists of the Portfolio Holder with responsibility for Planning matters; the chair of this Committee and a member of the Opposition Group. In addition, progress reports should be presented to the committee every six months.

Members will note there is a specific section of the Improvement Plan focusing on democratic improvements. Given that this area of work is of particular relevance to members, it is further suggested that the Planning Delegation Panel takes the role of a reference group for this section of the Improvement Plan, working with the Service Manager.

It is intended that a final version of the Improvement Plan, where appropriate reflecting members' comments arising from today's meeting, will be the subject of an executive decision by the Portfolio Holder for Growth and Regeneration, to be made as soon as possible.

4. Resource Implications

The service continues to operate against a challenging financial backdrop, with increasing demands and expectations upon it alongside an increasing proportion of development activity being deemed to be prior notification and thus not attracting a planning fee. Attracting and retaining staff remains a challenge in a competitive market.

The Improvement Plan includes the development and implementation of a new staffing structure, work on which is being led by the Chief Executive as part of a wider management review currently in progress. This will be the subject of formal consultation in due course.

In the meantime, early steps are being taken to increase the number of front-line planning staff employed and to strengthen capacity to review systems and processes, which are key to delivering efficiencies. These will be delivered from within existing agreed council resources.

The Plan also envisages the development of new income streams and, where consistent with the quasi-judicial nature of the service, a more entrepreneurial and commercial approach. This should help to offset cost pressures outlined above.

5. Recommendation

Members are invited to comment on the draft Improvement Plan attached at Appendix A.

6. Appendices

Appendix A – Draft Improvement Plan