

**Brighton and Hove City Council**

**Meeting:** Overview & Scrutiny Organisation Committee  
**Date:** 17<sup>th</sup> November 2003  
**Report of:** Director of Environment  
**Subject:** Implementing the Planning Review Recommendations  
**Wards affected:** All

**1. Purpose of the Report**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to outline the progress that has been made in implementing the recommendations of a review of the City Council's planning service and to report on those aspects of the service where further improvements will be made.

**2. Recommendations**

- 2.1 That members of OSOC note the progress that has been made in implementing the recommendations of a review of the planning service and the substantial improvement in performance that has been achieved.

**3. Information/Background**

*the need for a review*

- 3.1 'Development Control and Planning' is one of the council's top eight improvement areas agreed with the Audit Commission following the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) of services.
- 3.2 An internal review of the Planning Service was commissioned during the Summer of 2002 as a response to the council's poor performance against statutory development control performance indicators. As a result of this poor performance, Lord Rooker, the Minister for Housing, Planning and Regeneration had written to the Council expressing the government's concern and asking what steps would be taken to improve the council's performance in this important area of work.

### 3.3 The review of development control focussed on :

- the management, organisation, structure and culture of the service;
- the effect that internal service providers and external stakeholders and customers have on service provision;
- how major applications should be dealt with, and;
- improvements to the planning application process in order to streamline the process and improve performance

#### *the results of the review*

### 3.4 The results of the review highlighted the following issues:

- poor performance in the speed of processing planning applications
- lack of ownership of performance indicators
- a backlog of applications and an average caseload of planners significantly higher than other authorities.

#### *the review recommendations*

### 3.5 Key areas for improvement identified by the review included:

- change the culture, develop ownership of performance indicators and improve opportunities for training and development;
- revise processes and procedures to clear bottlenecks and unnecessary delays;
- improve internal communication with other departments to rationalise and speed up the processes, including:
  - a Section 106 working group to improve the corporate approach to dealing with major applications
  - an extended scheme of officer delegation
  - the launch of an online planning information resource to complement the City Council's frontline 'City Direct' service.

#### *implementing the review recommendations - what has changed?*

**3.6** Substantial progress has been made since April 2002 and members of the Development Control team have worked exceptionally hard to improve the service. The results are reflected in the figures set out below.

**3.6** There has been a sustained reduction in the time taken to determine planning applications across the performance categories. The result is that for the current year 2003/04, the team is on track to exceed national performance indicators in all but one of the Best Value Performance Indicators. Performance indicators for the first three months of months of the financial year show that:

BVPI 109a – 66.7% of major application determined in 13 weeks which **exceeds the target of 50%**

BVPI 109b – 67.77% (164 out of 242) minor applications determined in 8 weeks which **exceeds the target of 55%**

BVPI 109c - 80.51% (475 out of 590) other applications determined in 8 weeks which **exceeds the target of 70%**

BVPI 188 - 85.53% (721 out of 843) of all planning applications delegated to officers which is **below the target of 90%**

*(Quarter 2 figures are expected to illustrate further significant improvements).*

**3.7** Implementation of the review's recommended actions required capacity building, commitment and systems being put in place to implement the recommendations. A Project Steering Group was set up and continues to oversee implementation of the review recommendations. Accountability for performance is ensured through 'one-to-one' meetings with staff in the Development Control team to set and monitor performance targets

**3.8** Monitoring and Review systems have been put in place to ensure that the improvement actions continue to implemented and performance results are evaluated. This is through:

- a weekly Development Control Management Team
- Individual staff performance being monitored by the Head of Development Control
- Performance and feedback to staff at bi-monthly team meetings and monthly team meetings

- The Performance Team which monitors results against planning performance Indicators and reports monthly to the Chief Executive and quarterly to councillors

### *how can we continue to improve?*

3.9 Consultants acting on behalf of Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) carried out a separate evaluation of the development control service earlier this year (April 2003) and recognised the substantial progress that had been made and, *'a clear member and officer commitment to improvement and to meeting the targets'*. The consultants expressed concern however, that caseloads were not sustainable over the longer term and that potential obstacles could include a shortage of resources in terms of both staff and IT.

3.10 The consultants' findings illustrate the point that service improvement is not static. The planning service must continue to build upon the successful implementation of the planning review. Accordingly, the following priorities have been identified through team planning for this year.

- the need to sustain the culture change through career progression/development and training;
- a further extension to scheme of delegation (to 90%) to help improve performance further (and address BVPI 118);
- staff recruitment and retention;
- greater flexibility across the service in responding to peaks and troughs in development activity;
- a significant investment in ICT systems and e-planning solutions needs to be tied in to customer focussed service improvements.

3.11 The challenge will be to maintain the **quantitative** improvement in service delivery that has been achieved whilst delivering a **qualitative** improvement across the service.

## 4. Consultation

4.1 Extensive consultation was carried out as part of the review with all staff in the service, other directorates; members of the Planning Applications Sub Committee and other councillors.

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**Financial implications**

There are no financial implications directly resultant from this report. ODPM Planning Delivery Grant has been used to secure 3 additional development control planning officers.

*Finance Officer consulted: Yvonne Phillips .....date 20.10.03:*

**Legal implications**

There are no legal or human rights implications arising from this report.

*Lawyer consulted:: Hilary Woodward .....date 20.10.03:*

**Corporate/Citywide implications**

The planning service is a key front line service that makes decisions on the future heritage, design and appearance of the city's built environment

**Risk assessment**

It is essential that the service in respect of prominent statutory performance indicator continues to improve to avoid any risk of government intervention

**Sustainability implications**

The planning service plays a key role in promoting sustainable development.

**Equalities implications**

All sectors of the community should be able to access the development control service

**Implications for the prevention of crime and disorder**

There are none

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**Background papers** *[Part 1 reports only]*

**Contact Officer**

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