

PART 1 - PUBLIC

Decision Maker: **Development Control Committee**

Date: **9th April 2013**

Decision Type: Non-Urgent Non-Executive Non-Key

Title: **Planning Performance and Improvements**

Contact Officer: Jim, Kehoe, Deputy Chief Planner
Tel: 020 8313 4441 E-mail: jim.kehoe@bromley.gov.uk

Chief Officer: Marc Hume, Director of Renewal & Recreation

Ward: All

1. Reason for report

- 1.1 The Committee endorsed the Outline Planning Improvement Plan as a framework for improvement at its 29th January 2013 meeting and identified Customer Service as the first priority area. An updated version of the Improvement Plan is attached at Appendix One.

This report focuses on Customer Service, both the actions to date and proposals for future action. A parallel report will be made to the R&R PDS in June 2013.

2. **RECOMMENDATION(S)**

- 2.1 That the trend of planning application performance and other Customer Service improvements be noted and that the next steps in Customer Service performance, set out in the report, be endorsed.

Corporate Policy

1. Policy Status: Existing policy.
 2. BBB Priority: Excellent Council.
-

Financial

1. Cost of proposal: N/A
 2. Ongoing costs: N/A.
 3. Budget head/performance centre: Planning
 4. Total current budget for this head: £2.589m
 5. Source of funding: Existing revenue budget 2013/2014
-

Staff

1. Number of staff (current and additional): 64ftes (excluding Building Control, Land Charges)
 2. If from existing staff resources, number of staff hours: 14
-

Legal

1. Legal Requirement: Non-statutory - Government guidance.
 2. Call-in: Call-in is not applicable.
-

Customer Impact

1. Estimated number of users/beneficiaries (current and projected): those promoting and commenting on about 3,000 planning applications per year.
-

Ward Councillor Views

1. Have Ward Councillors been asked for comments? N/A.
2. Summary of Ward Councillors comments:

3. COMMENTARY

3.1 Planning Customers

Planning has contact with a relatively high volume of external customers. This is a direct result of our considering about 3,000 planning applications each year. Not only are there 3,000 applicants but there are also well-over 50,000 neighbour notifications arising from the planning applications. It is possible to compare different theoretical definitions of 'the customer' but for practical purposes it is important to plan for the fact that we have a wide variety of different customers and that there are large numbers of them. Planning accounts for over half of the total visits to the Bromley Council website which reflects the large number of interested parties and their wish to have an influence on the planning process.

The Council has already issued a Planning 'Statement of Community Involvement' (2006) which sets out the formal stages of communication and notification on planning applications and Development Plan preparation.

3.2 Action and Results so far

We want to complete some actions so that we can see some specific results and combine these with other actions that require more preparation.

An early set of actions comprised a review of the planning application process and in particular the early stages before and after applications are lodged with the Council, as reported to the January meeting. We can now identify quantitative results. About 70% of applications now reach the D.C. Case Officer in 5 working days as opposed to 10 or more working days. The number of applications pending has reduced from around 1100 in the second quarter of 2012/2013 to around 650 in the fourth quarter of 2012/2013. Fewer customers are awaiting a decision at any one time. Although it is just an early sign at the stage, we have also identified an increase in the number of householder and similar applications determined on time in March 2013. By having fewer applications pending at any one time, there is a greater opportunity for case officers to focus on individual applications. Other detailed operations have been changed, for example far more statutory consultations are now being carried out without paper copies and responses are made electronically, increasing our efficiency.

We have completed improvements to the Council website to assist our customers – including a reduction in the number of steps or 'clicks' that it takes to reach the details of a specific application when searching on the website.

The Council commenced its consultation on the new Local Plan at the end of February, for a six week period. This is aimed at maximising the use of the Council website and encouraging electronic responses to the consultation. However, paper copies of the documents are available to suit the customer requirements.

3.3 Proposed Actions

These are to be in addition to the above.

We have already found, during our review of the validation process, that gaining additional information from service users makes the improvement process more efficient. So in the next phase we do include specific initiatives to guide our forthcoming changes.

These will include in the next Quarter:-

- Commence customer surveys (applicants, consultees and neighbours), combined where possible with existing communications;
- Forum events with regular users (e.g., Applicants, Agents);
- Inviting Councillor feedback on the information they receive on Planning and, subject to discussion with the DCC Chairman, an all Councillor Seminar on Planning Customer Service or a wider invitation to Councillors to a DCC meeting.

4. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

4.1 None for the purpose of this report.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS (need to update these to latest available)

5.1 There are no direct revenue implications arising from this report.

5.2 A breakdown of the latest budget monitoring position and the 2013/14 budget is shown below for information: -

Type of expenditure/income	2012/13 Latest budget £'000	2012/13 Projected outturn £'000	2012/13 Projected variance £'000	2013/14 Budget £'000
Employees	3,060	2,768	(292)	2,631
Premises	10	10	0	10
Transport	19	21	2	21
Supplies & services	618	569	(49)	206
Income	(1,676)	(1,329)	347	(1,160)
Controllable budget	2,031	2,039	8	1,708
Net recharges	693	693	0	881
Total Net Budget	2,724	2,732	8	2,589

6. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 None for the purposes of this report.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 None for the purposes of this report.

Non-Applicable Sections:	
Background Documents: (Access via Contact Officer)	