

Decision Maker: R&R PDS Committee

Date: 18 November 2014

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

Title: **PLANNING SERVICE – PROGRESS WITH CUSTOMER SERVICE AND PLANNING APPLICATION PERFORMANCE**

Contact Officer: Jim Kehoe, Chief Planner
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Chief Officer: Marc Hume

Ward: All

1. Reason for report

Planning performance issues have recently been referred to by the Committee and in particular in the June 2014 minutes.

This report focusses on the following areas:-

- The service by telephone;
- Planning application performance
- It is intended that the Chief Planner will give a presentation to the Committee to expand upon the contents of the report.

2. **RECOMMENDATION(S)**

Progress with Customer Service and Planning Application Performance to be noted.

Corporate Policy

1. Policy Status: Existing Policy:
 2. BBB Priority: Excellent Council:
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Financial

1. Cost of proposal: Not Applicable:
 2. Ongoing costs: Not Applicable:
 3. Budget head/performance centre: Planning
 4. Total current budget for this head: £2.586m
 5. Source of funding: Existing Revenue Budget 2014/15
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Staff

1. Number of staff (current and additional): 60 fte (Excluding Building Control, Land Charges)
 2. If from existing staff resources, number of staff hours: 20 hours
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Legal

1. Legal Requirement: Non-Statutory - Government Guidance:
 2. Call-in: Not Applicable:
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Customer Impact

1. Estimated number of users/beneficiaries (current and projected): those projecting and commenting upon about 3,300 planning applications per year
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Ward Councillor Views

1. Have Ward Councillors been asked for comments? Not Applicable
2. Summary of Ward Councillors comments: not applicable

2.1 Background

Planning performance issues have recently been referred to by the Committee and in particular in the June 2014 minutes.

This report focusses on the following areas:-

- The service by telephone;
- Planning application performance
- It is intended that the Chief Planner will give a presentation to the Committee to expand upon the contents of the report.

3. COMMENTARY

3.1 The Planning Service for telephone customers

As part of the Improvement Plan for the Planning Service, as endorsed by the Development Control Committee, a new telephone system for the main enquiry number and modified staff practices were introduced in late 2013. This was in response to significant problems with telephone calls that existed up to that time.

The new telephone system includes monitoring information. The performance over the year 2014 for the main enquiry number is shown at Appendix One. This demonstrates that the Planning's main enquiry team performance now meets the Council standard of answering 80% of calls within 30 seconds. In this period, the Planning team's performance was one of the highest measured performances in the Council. This represents a good turnaround from previous levels of Planning performance and is due to a combination of a better system and the commitment of the staff concerned to achieve a high quality of service.

The Planning main enquiry number (0208 313 4956) is the recommended first public contact point for Planning.

3.2 Planning Application Performance

The Committee requested a specific focus on 'Minor' applications performance. The nationally used definition of the different types of applications mean that 'Minor' applications include for example between 1 and 9 new dwellings.

Planning Application performance for 2014/15 has declined across all of the types of applications, as shown at Appendix Two.

The main factors leading to this specific decline in performance are as follows:

- 6 staff resigned their posts mainly to move to the private sector representing between a quarter and a third of all Development Control officers;
- The volume of work has increased by about 10% (measured by application numbers determined);
- The fee income has increased, as shown in the Budget Monitoring Report elsewhere on the agenda;
- The availability of agency/self-employed planning staff has rapidly declined.

The longer term factors leading to a lower than average level of performance for minor applications in Bromley are:-

- A higher proportion than average number of cases being reported to Committee – in particular in Bromley Council the maximum threshold for these to be delegated decisions is 3 dwellings rather than the more typical 10 dwellings;
- In Bromley’s high quality environment, there are more demanding planning policy designations e.g. Conservation Areas, Tree Preservation Orders, that make most decisions more complex than the average.

In response to these factors the following action has been taken:-

- Job adverts for permanent staff were placed and four jobs offered and accepted within 2 months of resignations being received; due to notice periods there is nevertheless a gap between staff leaving and new staff arriving and a loss of output during the transitional periods. By the time the committee meets, we should be back to our full capacity;
- The actual and projected additional income is being used to employ additional temporary staff, however the additional applications and increasing income is a symptom of a rapidly rising market in the construction sector and this has had a marked impact on the planner job market;
- DC planner agency market has shifted so that far fewer staff of suitable quality are available to the Council. In short, our quick response option of using agency staff has gone. We have been more successful in employing staff who are newer to the profession and continue to try out different avenues for staff appointment.
- We have been carrying out system improvements and will continue to do so.

4. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

None arising directly from this report

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

None arising directly from this report

6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

None arising directly from this report

7. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

None arising directly from this report

Non-Applicable Sections:	[List non-applicable sections here]
Background Documents: (Access via Contact Officer)	[Title of document and date]

Planning Services Performance Levels

Telephone Customers:

The performance measure is to answer 80% of calls within 30 seconds.

2014	Current Planning Performance
January	85.54%
February	85.14%
March	81.70%
April	71.28%
May	79.99%
June	83.01%
July	80.61%
August	80.30%
September	74.93%
Jan – Sept 2014	80.10%
Council Target	80.00%

Planning Application Performance by Time Taken

	Major	Minor	Other
2013/2014	78%	50%	72%
2014/2015 to Date	47%	42%	68%
Target	60%	65%	80%