

March 2017

Development Services - Policy and Development end of year report

Service Plan Performance

The service area is continuing to perform at a high level with over 90% of planning applications determined within the statutory time scale.

The pattern over the last 3 year of high numbers of planning applications continues, resulting sustained high levels of fee income.

The number of appeals overturned by the Planning Inspectorate has settled down more recently as a number of gone in the Authority's favour. Officers prepare regular reports to planning committee to give members and officers an opportunity to review and learn lessons from the decisions and perhaps this is now helping.

The number of ongoing enforcement cases throughout the year has remained at a level of up to 160 open investigations.

The revised procedure to monitor section 106 agreements and contributions is working well, although the procedures are being kept under review and fine-tuned, particularly in respect of the level of collaborative working with the County Council and other partners. This was the subject of a recent review by Finance and Audit committee.

The householder 'drop in' service providing free pre-application advice on domestic extensions, etc. has been well received and continues to be fully booked on a weekly basis.

A pre application charging regime for the provision of non-householder pre-application advice was introduced in February 2016 and following a trial period, has been now been formally adopted on a permanent basis, as the scheme has been cost neutral and provides the level of service for pre-application advise our customers should expect.

A Land Charges Kiosk service was introduced in the Riverside House reception area which enables personal search providers to access the relevant information themselves without any input from officers and this is working well.

The Government continues to press ahead with proposals to move land charges to become the responsibility of the Land Registry in the next year or so.

Within Development Management, Officers are continuing to review processes and procedures to ensure that all areas of work are undertaken as effectively

and efficiently as possible whilst also ensuring a continuing high level of customer service.

We have been improving processes within the Conservation team as more information is held electronically. We did a review of the Conservation Advisory Forum and this has resulted in a more efficient and streamlined operation of the meetings, which are now held at the Council offices during the day. Conservation officers are also dealing with applications to reduce double handling and provide a better customer service.

The Joint Building Control service (Warwick/Daventry/Rugby) remains at a fairly constant level in terms of business despite strong competition from Approved Inspectors. Client customer satisfaction questionnaires are providing positive feedback recording a very high level of satisfaction. Income levels are slowly improving. Over the last 6 months, we have employed a marketing consultant to develop a marketing plan and this is now in place.

Between September and December 2016, the Local Plan Examination in Public took place and we have been in dialogue with the Inspector regarding the modifications to the local plan, which will enable the plan to be found sound. There will be a consultation period on the modifications and then when the Inspector has considered the responses, he will issue his report, with the hope that we will be able to adopt the local plan by late summer. In conjunction with the local plan, we are progressing the Community Infrastructure Levy to ensure that we have the scheme in place at the same time as the adoption of the local plan.

We will also progress other development plan documents and supplementary planning documents to ensure that we have a suite of policy documents in place. Furthermore, we have a number of neighbourhood plans at various different stages and continue to provide support to towns and villages preparing their plans.

Development Services has a permanent part time officer working on HS2. This ensures that WDC is fully engaged with the legislative process. Also as a designated authority, the first in the country, the officer will deal effectively and appropriately with the related planning applications. We are also assisting areas that are significantly affected by HS2 by liaising with the public and parish councils and ensuring that they understand the process. We have recently confirmed the process for dealing with the applications when we receive them.

Risks

Risks to the service area are as follows:

Local Plan being delayed or not being adopted with impacts on our ability to defend appeals or resist applications outside the green belt and inability to progress needed development in the green belt

Lack of marketing Building Control service resulting in loss of business to Approved Inspector's

Volume of work – increase in number of planning and building regulation applications

Difficulty in recruiting professional experienced staff generally

Work Volumes: The volume of work generally remains at a high level and whilst all staff continue to work as effectively as possible, and are fully supported by managers in doing so, there is a risk of increased levels of health and well-being impacts that managers are monitoring closely.

Workforce Planning

Over the past year, there have been significant difficulties in recruiting experienced professional staff, although over the last few months of the year this has improved, and we no longer have agency staff. There are a couple of posts we are in the process of recruiting to but we are hopeful that they will be permanent members of staff. We have also considered ways of developing staff so that we 'grow our own' expertise. This has included recruiting staff into trainee posts, and we have recruited an apprentice in Building Control.

Succession Planning: Historically, Development Services have had some difficult experiences with the lack of succession planning severely impacting on the service, and therefore we are trying to ensure that we have plans in place by training and developing staff to assist in their career development. We have had a number of staff who have been successful in this.

Skills, Training and Competency Needs: Officers are developing a service area training plan following on from staff appraisals, which will provide generic training as well as specialist planning and building control training.

Finance

Development Services achieved the 2.5% saving on discretionary budgets for 2016/17.

The additional work to progress the local plan has required the Planning Reserves being topped up. There has been a need to carry out some short pieces of work to strengthen our evidence for the local plan examination.

Budget: Officers have been involved in additional finance training throughout the year.

Procurement: As part of the training stated above, officers are working closely with the Procurement team to ensure that procedures are improved, which includes regular surgery sessions.

Contract management: Through a significant amount of work and scrutiny of the Contracts Register for the service area by Finance and Audit, the data held is now much clearer and has helped us as a service area understand what needs to be included in the Contracts Register. An up-to-date contracts register is being maintained and was recently reviewed by Finance and Audit committee.

Audits: We have had a number of recent audits which have all had satisfactory or substantial ratings.

Risk Register: This is regularly reviewed for the service area with the Portfolio Holder.

Work Streams and Projects

Building Control:

We have been transferring Rugby and Daventry ICT systems onto IDOX which is a major migration process and very time consuming and costly for the joint Building Control service. Daventry's migration is near completion and Rugby's is also progressing well..

The Building Control service is established and recognised by Architects and Builders who continue to use the service as we are able to remain competitive, cost neutral and reactive. We have a strong relationship with Warwick University and have a number of jobs being inspected there. We are inspecting the JLR Honiley new test facility, and projects at Warwick Hospital. Rugby School has over £30 million to spend over the next few years. Work has recently picked up in Daventry area due to the BC service being more robust and customer focused.

We are in the process of re-branding the service and implementing the business and marketing plans.

Development Management:

Across Development Services there is a need to continually improve the electronic delivery of the services we offer, in particular for development management and building control as they are very customer facing services.

The Government has recently announced the opportunity for local authorities to increase their planning fees by 20% on the basis that the service improves. We are in the process of reviewing the service and ensuring that there is adequate resources in other service areas to ensure that the response times from statutory consultees and other internal partners enables development management to deal with applications in an efficient and effective way.

Policy:

A number of neighbourhood plans have progressed during the last year and we will continue to support other towns and parishes as they develop theirs, with the hope that a number will reach adoption during the year.

The local plan is now in its latter stages as it moves towards modifications consultation and then adoption. Linked to this we will be submitting the Community Infrastructure Levy for examination process in the next few months. Work to allocate sites for Gypsy and Traveller sites is also progressing in the Local Development Scheme. Also, work is commencing on Plans for Leamington.