

DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

Portfolio Holder Statement Update – end of year 2013/14

1 What have the measures in the Portfolio Holder Statement been telling you about how things are going in service during 2013/14?

The service area is continuing to perform at a high level with regard to planning application performance with the number of planning applications determined within the statutory time scale remaining at over 90%. It should be noted that there have been a high number of large scale housing schemes submitted within the period. This has resulted in a significant increase in levels of income to date.

The proportion of planning applications submitted electronically has remained stable throughout the year at between 60 – 64%. Our aim is to increase that proportion to over 70%.

The number of successful appeals against officer decisions remains fairly low, together with the number of successful appeals against decisions where members have overturned officer's recommendations. This data is regularly reported to planning committee to be used as a learning tool for officers and members.

The number of enforcement cases registered is generally consistent throughout the year. Whilst there has been a reduction in the amount of resource in the team, there has been focus on dealing with the older decisions to bring them to a conclusion. These have halved in number. We have also focused heavily on ensuring processes are fully electronic and streamlined.

The number of full searches received in the year has reduced by approximately 15% as more people are having personal searches done as they are quicker and cheaper. We have been moving to a more streamlined electronic system of searches which will enable customers to be able to do their own search on-line in the future.

Building Control cases are remaining at a fairly constant level, which in an economic downturn and strong competition from Approved Inspectors is positive. However, the scale and nature of the cases has reduced, which has affected income. Building Control continues to receive positive feedback from clients responding to the customer satisfaction questionnaire, with 98% saying they are very satisfied or fairly satisfied with the service they have received.

The percentage of commercial property voids reflects the condition of individual properties and the market conditions. Those that are empty for longer tend to be in a poorer condition. Until recently the market for offices (in particular) has been poor. When comparing Estates income with the projection, it is broadly on target, which is good considering the market conditions.

The programme for the Local Plan has been kept under review during the year. Due to decisions by the Inspector of the Coventry Core Strategy, the timetable for the Local Plan submission has been delayed to enable a joint Strategic Housing Market Assessment to be undertaken. Whilst the Local Plan has continued to progress, the complexities of the context within which we are working has meant the original timetable could not be achieved without significantly undermining the soundness of the Plan.

2. Which measures have been of particular interest or concern during the period and what have you learnt about your systems from these measures?

The public reaction to the Local Plan has been monitored. The 2013 Revised Development Strategy consultation has received a similar level of public response as the 2012 Preferred Options. This seems to indicate ongoing public concern about the proposals which we are analysing in detail. It is interesting to note however, that the public response to the Gypsy and Traveller proposals was three times higher than the revised development strategy and this is having an impact on the Policy team's resources. The consultation on sites in villages also received a high level of response, indicating that these issues are also felt strongly in rural areas. All these consultation underlined the sensitivities associated with new housing and also the importance of delivering high quality infrastructure

Performance on determining planning applications continues at a high level which demonstrates that processes and procedures that have been put in place are working well, and the team have taken responsibility for their performance, at a time when Government are targeting Local Authorities that are not achieving statutory targets.

The proportion of planning applications submitted that were valid on receipt (i.e. included all of the information required to enable them to be progressed at the time that they were submitted) continues to be at a low level of between 50 and 60%. Following the benchmarking that was undertaken last year, with support from the Planning Advisory Service and peer authorities we will be commencing a project designed to significantly improve performance in this area.

The current financial situation does not allow easy investment into properties that are currently void (particularly the regency buildings). In developing the business case for 26 Hamilton Terrace with H&P S, the team is using demand data to assess commercial viability eg: local office requirement data, interviews with potential tenants, Althorpe waiting list. There is a significant contrast between the modern Althorpe Enterprise Hub (Fully let) and other regency offices (eg: 4 Jury Street, 26 Ham Terrace) that are void.

In Building Control, Approved Inspectors are continuing to provide strong competition. The Local Approved Inspectors are concentrating on our traditional "bread and butter" domestic market with some success. One of the key projects in responding to this has been the implementation of a shared building control

service with three of our neighbouring authorities, Rugby, Daventry and Coventry, which Warwick DC is the lead authority.

Customer surveys are carried out but could be shared better across the service area and with staff so there are lessons learnt to make them worthwhile and demonstrate to the customer that we make changes because we have listened.

3. What have you done to date as a result of learning from these measures?

Performance on planning applications and enforcement is regularly discussed in team meetings. Although monitoring monthly data is important, longer term trend data provides useful information and we are beginning to build on and use this information. Staff are also taking more responsibility for their case load and performance of the service. As said earlier, a mechanism for learning from appeal decisions is now taking place

We have learnt that we need to survey all our customers, ie. Committee, applicants and neighbours to developments, users of building control and estates. This also needs to be done more frequently.

We have reviewed the land charges service in terms of the cost of searches, as we are significantly more expensive than other authorities in the sub-region Also, the impact of personal searches is increasing (which is inevitable as they are cheaper and quicker). The service has become more electronic in the last year which helps us deal with them quicker and be more competitive with personal search companies. We have reviewed our fees and as a result are as competitive as all other authorities in the sub-region and have better evidence on how the cost has been derived.

On the Local Plan we have:

- We have agreed a revised Local Plan timetable
- Brought in some additional support (eg work experience and external procurement) to work on consultation inputting and analysis
- Undertaken further studies on air quality, historic environment, transport and housing requirements
- Developed revised site options and policies which are now being prepared for presentation to Council in April 2014.

The consultations on the Local Plan have underlined how important the delivery of high quality infrastructure is.

As indicated in 2 above, there is significant progress now being made on the shared service for Building Control and this will provide the resilience to the service needed in the future.

4. What has been the impact of what you have done to date?

There was a re-structure of the service area last year and this has provided us with the opportunity to review the way we were working and to ensure that the service is fit for purpose.

We have been reviewing all the processes and procedures for each part of the service area so that we streamline what we are doing. This continuous improvement work is on-going and has helped us turn performance around, in particular in planning and enforcement, which continues to be at a high level.

One of the recommendations from the Peer Review was to prepare an Enforcement Procedure which has now been adopted. It has assisted the Enforcement Team in prioritising their workload and to provide customers with clarity about the enforcement investigation process. Performance has improved significantly in terms of responses to complaints.

Executive have approved the formation of a Local List of Historic Buildings which is intended to safeguard buildings and structures which whilst not benefitting from national listing are nevertheless of local historic and architectural note. This will be based on a system of criteria against which requests will be considered and it is anticipated that this will commence early next year.

Fundamentally we have changed the way we can make decisions on the non-operational property in estates. We are reviewing the transfer of Estates Management to ensure that we take the option that is best for delivery of the service.

Building Control is working with the three other authorities in the shared service to ensure that we align the way we work so that the customer receives a consistent service across all the authorities involved.

The delays to the Local Plan may have had an impact on the number of major housing planning applications we have received this year. Work on the Local Plan is progressing and is still on track to deliver the revised timetable. Allocation of sites in villages has been dovetailed in to the Local Plan and proposals for Gypsies and Travellers also progressing parallel.

5. What else do you plan to do as a result of learning from these measures?

Different areas of the service are working more closely so that we can offer a better and more joined up service to the customer in a more timely way. As part of that approach officers are also engaging with a peer group comprising representatives of a small number of other similar Local Planning Authorities in order to learn from each other and assist in the provision of a more cost effective and efficient planning service.

Officers have been working closely with the Planning Advisory Service who carried out a Peer Review of the service. We are part of a number of benchmarking groups, and share knowledge with other authorities who also want to learn from the improvements we have made.

There is still further work to do to ensure that the service area is more cost effective and competitive.

With regard to the local plan, there are so many changes at a national level, as well as decisions being made on other authorities local plans that need to be

reflected upon and have had an influence over delaying our timetable, but it is important that the plan progresses towards being a sound plan as we go to examination.

The consultations on the Local Plan underlined how important the delivery of high quality infrastructure is. We are addressing this by preparing an Infrastructure Delivery Plan and importantly by bringing in a new post (funded by development) to monitoring S106 contributions and coordinate the delivery of infrastructure associated with major development sites.

At the half yearly review, members requested a more regular review of the Annual Monitoring Review. However, this is linked into the Regional monitoring that is done annually and it is therefore recommended that we continue on an annual basis.

Members also asked for officers to consider a Conservation Advisory Board for Warwick, the feasibility of which will be explored in 2014/15.

6. Of your key projects (as identified in your portfolio holder statement) how many were completed and how many are not? Of those that were not completed please indicate what the revised dates are.

Project Name	Progress	Original Milestones	New Milestones
Building Control			
Exploring shared service	Significant progress being made and trial underway	Implementati on Jan 14	On target
Review emergency call-outs	Part of shared service review	June 13	May 14
Planning policy			
Development of draft Local Plan	Plan is still being developed ready for submission in Summer 2014	Submission originally to Council June 13	Submission draft to Council Mar/Apr 14

Development of Warwick AAP	Policies now subsumed in Local Plan. Delivery of opportunity being progressed	N/A	
Support Neighbourhood Plans	4 neighbourhood plan areas have been designated and further 5 have been submitted for designation	On-going	5 further designation during 2014/15. Likely that first Plans will be submitted for Examination
Develop CIL Scheme	Draft CIL scheme being prepared for submission alongside Local Plan	Submission Draft to Full Council in June 2013	Submission draft to Council in April 2014
Gypsy and Traveller Site Allocations	Initial options consultation complete. Preferred Options consultation started in March 2014		Submission draft to Council in July 2014 and submission to SoS in Sept/Oct 2014
HS2	Support being provided in terms of planning (officer now in post)	On-going	
Leamington AAP	Initial work commenced	Mar 14	Work to commence on AAP in early 2015

Development Management			
Monitoring performance of determining planning applications	On-going	April 2012	Target met
Planning portal on-line submissions – encourage applicants to make on-line submissions	On-going	Target of 70% by Mar 14	Oct 14
Customer satisfaction surveys	Work has progressed in some areas of the service	June 13	June 14
Review validation checklist	Work has progressed	July 13	May 14
Develop pre-application charging service	Decision made not to progress this	N/A	
Review planning committee		April 13 review done –	Target met
Review S106/CIL implementation	Delay with the implementation of CIL by Central Government		
Monitor S106 contributions including levy at 3%	In place – although set at 1% up to max of £30K	April 13	In place
Develop and implement training plan	Training plan being developed	June 13	Ongoing
Review the use of ICT systems	This is to improve the way we deliver services and	April 13 – this work is continuous	

	to make us more effective and efficient		
Economic Development & Regeneration			
Events Intervention	This project has now been handed over to the events team	May 13	In place
Jobs, Skills & Economy Delivery Plan	This is now awaiting new Leader in place to decide how to take this forward	Sept 13	To be confirmed
Review, Development and delivery of town centre action plans	Progress made on Warwick and Kenilworth	On-going	N/A
Tourism Strategy Implementation	DMO launched Oct 13	May 13	In place
Visitor Services Review		May 13	Jun 14
Provide staff resource into Stoneleigh Hub Enterprise scheme	Project has changed and WDC are no longer providing staff	N/A	
Community Right to Bid	Procedures put in place to deal with bids.	April 13	On-going

7. Does your Service Area Plan/Portfolio Holder Statement need to be amended? If so, please describe the changes.

Changes and updates to milestones have been done to the Service Area Plan for 2014/15. The service area has been through significant changes over the last few years and there are external and internal factors that result in some of the target dates not being delivered, particularly in relation to the Local Plan .