

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF PLANNING AND REGENERATION

PLANNING PERFORMANCE QUARTER 1 2015/16

RECOMMENDATION:

For information and discussion.

REASON FOR REPORT:

To provide the Committee with information on the performance of Planning Services for quarter 1 within the 2015-16 financial year.

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION:

Performance against targets and Planning Service staffing in the immediate future.

RELATIONSHIP TO CORPORATE PLAN:

Well Managed Council

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS: Planning performance has the potential for significant financial implications in the event that applications are not determined within 26 weeks or an extension of time negotiated. In that instance the planning fee is returned.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS: The Government monitors planning performance in terms of speed and quality of decision making. In the event minimum standards are not met, an authority may be designated as being in special measures allowing applicants to apply for permission direct from the Planning Inspectorate and bypassing local decision making. The speed measure is the number of major applications determined within 13 weeks as measured over a 2 years period. The target of more than 40% has been met (51%). The quality measure is the percentage of major applications determined over a two year period that have been overturned at appeal. The less than 20% target has been met (6%).

RISK ASSESSMENT: Financial risk as a result of fee return and the designation of planning authorities in special measures for underperformance is referred to above. These aspects are actively monitored, to allow priorities to be adjusted as required to reduce the risk.

1.0 PLANNING PERFORMANCE

Set out below are the Planning Service performance figures for quarter one 1st April – 30th June 2015.

Performance data is published quarterly on the Council's website at <http://www.middevon.gov.uk/index.aspx?articleid=4026>

The performance for this first quarter is set out below and expressed as a percentage unless marked otherwise and reports against a mix of Government and local performance targets.

Planning Service Performance	Target	Qu 1 2015/16
Major applications determined within 13 weeks	60%	57
Minor applications determined within 8 weeks	65%	68
Other applications determined within 8 weeks	80%	91
Householder applications determined in 8 weeks	85%	92
Listed Building Consents	80%	70

Enforcement site visits undertaken within 15 days of complaint receipt	87%	100%
Delegated decisions	90%	94%
Applications over 13 weeks old without a decision	Less than 45 applications	25
Major applications determined within 13 weeks (over last 2 years)	More than 40%	51
Determine all applications within 26 weeks or with an extension of time (per annum –Government planning guarantee)	100%	97%
Building Regulations Applications examined within 3 weeks	95%	70%
Building Regulation Full Plan applications determined in 2 months	95%	99%

In addition during this quarter activity within the enforcement part of the Planning Service included:

Number of new enforcement cases registered	14
Number of enforcement cases closed	47
Number of committee authorisations sought	3
Number of planning contravention notices served	Data available from Qu 2
Number of breach of condition notices served	0
Number of enforcement notices served	0

This period corresponded with the time that resources in planning enforcement were limited to a single officer whilst recruitment took place to fill vacant posts. The enforcement part of the service is now fully staffed.

The performance for quarter 1 of 2015/16 shows that in the majority of instances targets are being met or exceeded. However the major application target of 60% determined within 13 weeks was narrowly missed (57%) and Listed Building Consent application performance against the target of 80% determined in 8 weeks was 70%. It continues to be a challenging period for the Planning Service in terms of staffing due to maternity leave and the departure of members of staff. Recruitment has been undertaken to replace the majority of vacancies. New members of staff have recently arrived or are expected shortly. Work areas within conservation have been reviewed and redistributed within the team.

In the publication 'Fixing the foundations: creating a more prosperous nation' as part of the summer budget 2015, the Government has indicated its intention to tighten planning performance requirements so that local authorities making 50% or fewer decisions on time or those processing minor applications too slowly at risk of designation. The Government's planning guarantee requires that authorities determine all planning applications within 26 weeks unless an extension of time is agreed with the applicant. If not, the planning fee is returned. Within this publication the Government has also indicated its intention to significantly tighten the planning guarantee for minor applications. Planning performance continues to be closely monitored. The performance of the planning service against targets will therefore become increasingly important and presents a financial risk to the authority in the event that the planning guarantee is not met.

The Building Control team has seen significant changes over 2014/15 with the redundancy of the Building Control Manager at the end of quarter 3. The Manger previously acted as an Inspector over part of the District and managed a caseload of applications. With the reduction in the size of the team the time taken for certain activities has increased. A review of the Building Control service including workloads and level of staffing has been undertaken in conjunction with North Devon Council's Building Control Manager. Recommendations have been made to improve future service delivery including the development of a shared service and management between Mid and North Devon Building Control.

Current policy production targets are as follows:

Document	Anticipated presentation
Local Plan Review	Pre-submission stage. Review of consultation responses.
CIL Draft charging schedule	Pre-submission stage. Review of consultation responses.
Annual Monitoring Report	Presented to Cabinet February 2015
Heritage Assets Register	Published on website
Cullompton Article 4 Review	Consultation completed December 2014, target to Cabinet September 2015
Conservation Area Appraisals and Management Plans: Thorverton Morchard Bishop Newton St Cyres Cheriton Fitzpaine Silverton	Presented to Cabinet July 2015
Solar & Wind Landscape Sensitivity SPD	In preparation - further analysis in progress
Self Build guidance / SPD	In preparation
Open Space SPD	In preparation

The priority for the Forward Planning Team continues to be the Local Plan Review and associated tasks. Vacant posts within the Forward Planning section have now been filled including an interim Team Leader. Further resources via consultancy have also been secured to ensure sufficient staff are in place to complete the Local Plan Review process through examination and to adoption.

Every effort continues to be made to maintain our charter standards of customer service and our performance levels within the eight and thirteen week government target periods. Whilst the staffing situation has improved during this first quarter, the development management team is not yet at full complement and staffing change within this team will continue throughout the financial year as a result of maternity leave and associated cover arrangements.

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List of Background Papers: PS1 and PS2 returns
'Fixing the foundations – creating a more prosperous nation' HM Treasury July 2015

Circulation of the Report: Cllr Richard Chesterton
Members of Planning Committee