



Report for:	Strategic Planning and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Date of meeting:	19 September 2018
Part:	1
If Part II, reason:	

Title of report:	Planning, Development and Regeneration Performance End of Year Report 2017-18
Contact:	Cllr Graham Sutton, Portfolio Holder for Planning and Infrastructure Author/Responsible Officer: James Doe, Assistant Director – Planning, Development and Regeneration
Purpose of report:	To set out the performance outturn for the service for 2017-18
Recommendations	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. That the report be noted 2. That the Committee receives a further report on the Building Control service in accordance with the Committee Work Programme
Corporate objectives:	All Corporate Objectives are relevant with this annual review of service performance.
Implications:	<u>Financial</u> None arising from decisions on this report though the financial indicators for Building Control and Local Land Charges report an under recovery of income against target levels, and an over-recovery for planning fee income.
'Value for money' implications	<u>Value for money</u> None arising from this report.
Risk implications	Risk register currently under review.
Community Impact	

Assessment	Not applicable for this report.
Health and safety Implications	Not applicable for this report.
Consultees:	Mark Gaynor, Corporate Director Housing and Regeneration Chris Taylor, Group Manager Strategic Planning and Regeneration Sara Whelan, Group Manager Development Management and Planning
Background papers:	Performance report for 2017-18 (appendix 1)
Glossary of acronyms and any other abbreviations used in this report:	Als – Approved Building Control Inspectors LABC – Local Authority Building Control

Executive Summary

1. The report provides the end of year performance position for the Planning, Development and Regeneration service for 2017-18. It follows the quarterly reports on performance that have already been considered by the Committee for this business year.
2. The report covers 17 Indicators, of which five are for information only; eight are at green, one at amber and three at red. The end of year performance report is at appendix 1.
3. Overall performance across the service has been strong with planning decision turnaround times all exceeded, planning fee income exceeded by over 30%, and over 80% of planning appeals successfully defended.
4. The red indicators cover income levels in Building Control and Local Land Charges income, and speed of validation of planning applications.

Key Issues

5. Building Control income. The quarter 3 report to the Committee on 20 March 2018 set out a shortfall against target income and the service ended the year around £90,000 under target. The service remains staffed mainly by officers employed through employment agency arrangements, despite attempts to fill establishment posts earlier in the year. The service management arrangements with Watford Borough Council ended in the Spring of 2018.
6. The main issue, apart from recruitment difficulties, is the competitive position of the Council's building control service against private providers, known as Approved Inspectors (Als). The Council, as the local authority building control service is entitled to set its own fees locally, but it is bound by the requirement

to set these at a level that reflect the costs of delivering the service over a three-year rolling period; in other words, it is not entitled to make a profit on fee income on that basis. Fees were raised last year by 10% across the board to help bolster income, yet the needs to both balance income and expenditure and to remain attractive to new and recurring business has to be considered.

7. The AI providers, as commercial organisations are not bound by these rules and consequently have more flexibility on the setting of fees for their work. AIs tend not to publish their fees, which are often negotiated on a case by case basis. There is a need, by contrast, for the Council to be transparent on what it charges and what it spends on providing its building control service. Given the Council's constraints, it has to compete on quality of service, running in conjunction with a reasonable level of fees commensurate with the value of work that a builder or developer is undertaking.
8. With the ending of the management arrangement with Watford Borough Council, an experienced interim manager has been appointed to run the service.
9. Whilst the reliance on Agency staff for the service remains, a number of service improvements have been introduced and are being rolled out. These include the provision of a direct text number for builders to contact Dacorum Building Control on to request a site inspection – this is logged automatically in the back office system and appointments for Building Control Officers to visit building sites are made. To assist with this, customers are being provided with a free keyring with the Dacorum Building Control text number on the keyring strap.
10. Customers are being provided with a site development log document to record each inspection, note progress made and issues raised. Dacorum Building Control services can now be booked on a smartphone via the LABC (Local Authority Building Control) app. Also the interim manager has begun a marketing campaign to businesses which started with a presentation of the service to the Hemel Hempstead Business Ambassadors.
11. The fee structure is also under review at present with the aim of increasing income.
12. Finally, operational changes are being made at The Forum to ensure as many requests for the service are dealt with on a same day basis. This includes grouping the officers closely together and the live monitoring of casework through enhanced use of the software system to aid performance management of cases.
13. The service improvements and developments are ongoing, and given the importance of improving the Council's competitive position and raising its fee income, a further update report will be brought back to the Committee later in the business year.
14. Local Land Charges income. This resulted in a shortfall of just over £60,000 against the budgeted target of £291,000. As reported in March 2018 for quarter 3 of the year, there continues to be a slowdown in the local property market which is affecting receipts for local searches on properties which the service provides.

15. Like Building Control, the service is subject to competition, and again the service is not permitted to make a profit, which its competitors are able to do. Unlike Building Control, monitoring of trends carried out shows that competition is not the issue as the Council's market share has increased, albeit of a smaller market.
16. The service is working with accountancy to review its fee structure, and further service improvements are being considered through the current year service plan.
17. Planning Validation. Despite a big improvement in processing times of registering planning applications and making them valid for consideration towards the end of the year, the final result was disappointing with 43% of applications validated within three days of receipt.
18. As mentioned in previous reports, slower validation times has not adversely affected the key performance measures of processing planning applications where the outcomes have remained strong. Faster validation will enable the service to issue more decisions within the statutory timescales so overall it remains an important objective.
19. Improved management regimes of sorting applications by complexity have been brought in, so that sufficient time is allocated to larger application cases which take longer to validate, and that the smaller application proposals are not being unnecessarily held up. Early results for 2018/19 which will be reported in due course through the quarter 1 report for 2018/19 are encouraging with July at 92% and August at 68%, with the caveat that there will be differences from month to month depending on the mix and complexity of applications that the Council receives.
20. As part of the suite of new posts being brought in to the planning service this year, recruitment will begin shortly for a dedicated Business Support Team Leader to directly manage the team of Planning Registry Officers, with performance management of the throughput of cases to be validated a key objective and requirement of the postholder.
21. Other Performance results. Members will note that all three processing targets for dealing with planning applications remain above target (DMP04-06). Members will note that a number of new posts are being added to the service this year to bolster its capacity to deal with the increasing complexity of cases, and to improve efficiency.
22. A key action for 2018/19 is the roll out of a new software system for planning, to replace the older Acolaid system which has been used for the last 20 years or so. With this brings the ability for improved performance management of cases with the aim of making the system better for customers of the service and to assist in the improved throughput of applications.
23. After a lengthy competitive process, procurement of the new system is being finalised currently. Installation of the new system will be rolled out, with appropriate user testing, across the rest of 2018/19.

24. 2017/18 was a good year for planning appeal successes, with over 82% of appeals to the Planning Inspectorate against the Council's decision to refuse planning permission being dismissed, or in other words, the Inspector endorsing the Council's original decision. This is up from 69% in 2016/17.
25. Finally the Committee is asked to note one correction to the performance report at Appendix 1, where the data has not transferred correctly. This is for indicator PE01, the percentage of priority 1 enforcement cases dealt with within one day was at 100%, with 9 out of 9 cases.

Conclusions

26. 2017/18 was a strong year for planning performance, with all indicators exceeded and a considerable surplus in fee income over target. The service is bringing forward operational improvements in 2018/19 to improve efficiency in the processing of planning applications. The new planning software system will be installed and rolled out for implementation in early to mid 2019.
27. The main area for improvement is in Building Control. Attracting and retaining staff remains an issue given the competitive nature of the service and a low supply of professionals in the field. Measures are in place to improve the attractiveness of the service as outlined in the report.

Recommendations

28. The Committee is asked to note the report and agree that a further report is made on Building Control matters during 2018/19.