



Report for:	<b>Strategic Planning and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee</b>
Date of meeting:	<b>15 June 2021</b>
Part:	<b>1</b>
If Part II, reason:	

Title of report:	<b>Planning, Development and Regeneration Quarter 4 Performance Report 2020-21</b>
Contact:	Cllr Alan Anderson, 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 Quarter 4 of 2020-21
Recommendations	That the report is noted.
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 Planning fees and Local Land Charges report an under recovery of income against target levels.
'Value for money' implications	<u>Value for money</u>  None arising from this report.
Risk implications	None arising from this report. Risks addressed through service level risk register.

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 (appendix 1)
Glossary of acronyms and any other abbreviations used in this report:	None.

1. This report presents the performance outturn for the Planning, Development and Regeneration service for the fourth quarter (January-March) of the business year 2020-21. The full performance report is at Appendix 1.
2. Of 15 indicators, six are running at green; four at red; two at amber; and three are for information only.

### **Income**

3. Planning fees income (FIN 16). The financial position has ended the year at receipts of just over £1.15m, representing an achievement rate of 95.5% on the budgeted income of just over £1.2m. As explained in Q3 report to the Committee, the recovery rate improved from Q1 when a 21% under-recovery against the expected receipts at that stage in the business year, and by the end of Q2, the rate of under-recovery had narrowed to 7.6%.
4. At the start of the pandemic in early 2020, it was considered that income could drop by around a third, and whereas it is disappointing that targeted budget was not fully achieved, a less than 5% shortfall has to be seen in this context.
5. The number of applications received continued to rise strongly, at 853 for Q4, up on the 749 received for Q3, and up again from the 692 planning and related applications were received in Q2. Much of this additional workload falls into the householder and prior approval categories of development where the statutory fees are comparatively low; hence the large rise in workload does not necessarily translate into much higher fee receipts.

6. Land Charges Income (FIN17). The financial year 2020/21 has ended on fee receipts of just under £207k, a shortfall of just over £24k against the budget target of £231 and giving an achievement rate of 89.5%.
7. As reported previously, at the end of Q1, under-recovery of fees was running at 61% of the profiled income target. This had narrowed to 35% by the end of Q2, 19% at Q3 and ending the year at an under-recovery of an improved 10.5%. The service also operated within the target of processing land charges searches of just under ten days (LC04).
8. Also as reported previously, the housing market appears to have responded well to the stamp duty holiday for purchases up to £500,000. This runs until 31 March 2021. Members will note that the Chancellor of the Exchequer has extended the stamp duty holiday at this level until 30 June 2021, when it tapers down to a £250,000 purchase threshold before reverting to the previous £125,000 threshold on 1 October this year.

### **Development Management Performance**

9. As outlined above, incoming caseload remains high at 853 applications received in Q4, up nearly 14% on Q3. The proportion of caseload running over time has come down from 41% in Q4 of 2019/20 to 28% at Q4 this year.
10. In Q4, 62.5% of major applications were determined on time (DMP04), within target but down from very high performance of 87.5% in Q3. The number of major applications received and determined by the Service is much lower compared to the other categories and therefore fluctuations in performance between quarters are bound to occur. The complexity of major applications can vary significantly and this will also influence determination timescales against the statutory period of 13 weeks from receipt, or 16 weeks where the application involves environmental impact assessment.
11. Minor applications (DMP05) slipped into the amber category at just under 65% determined within 8 weeks of receipt. This dip in performance can be attributed to a number of older cases being finalised as part of the Service's drive to reduce the level of caseload running over time, as mentioned in para 9 above.
12. Performance the 'others' category remained high at 84% determined on time within 8 weeks of the statutory period (DMP06), comparable to the 85% in Q3 and 86% in Q2.
13. The validation of planning applications remains strong at 88% validated within three days of receipt by the Council, significantly above the target of 70% (DMP08), though down a little from the 91% achieved in Q3. This high level of performance has been maintained constantly across the quarter.
14. There has been an improvement on the Council's success rate in defending planning appeals in Q4 (DMP30) with six out of ten appeals dismissed by Planning Inspectors, though this remains at red on the attached performance report where we expect a 70% success rate.
15. Further monitoring by the Service indicates that the challenge rate on the Council's planning decisions has been increasing this year: in Q3, nearly half of all refusals issued by the Council were subject to appeals, and this may be

driving an increased success rate for appellants. In Q4, the challenge rate fell to just over 21%. The Service will continue to monitor these trends.

16. Members are reminded that quarterly reports on appeals are now being made to the Development Management Committee and that details of any appeal decisions received by the Council are being sent out on Fridays with the Members' News email.

### **Enforcement**

17. The remaining exceptions to good performance are under the indicators covering time taken to carry out site visits for priority 1 and 2 planning enforcement cases (PE01 and PE02), running at 50% and 40% respectively.
18. As explained in the Q3 report, the reasons are two-fold: firstly a large increase in cases being reported for investigation, and secondly Covid19 restrictions which have limited the ability of Officers to get out on site and make the first visit to investigate.
19. A twelve-month improvement plan to bring down the live caseload in enforcement by a third from 600 cases to 400 is now underway. A further officer has been recruited, and is now in place, for this period.
20. As Members will be aware, enforcement cases often take a long time to resolve and as the measures outlined take effect, it is likely that these indicators may remain as red for some time to come.

### **New Homes**

21. Completion of new homes in the Borough (SPR05) ended strongly in 2020/21 with 223 units in Q4. This brings the annual figure to 674, being depressed only by a very low level of completions (30 units) in Q1, which followed the initial Covid19 lockdown. This indicator will gain increasing significance over the coming year and beyond given that the housing need for Dacorum from the Government's standard method now stands at 1,023 units per annum and that the number of new completions is monitored closely by central government through the Housing Delivery Test.