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Strategic Planning and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee

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| Report for: | Strategic Planning and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee |
| Title of report: | Planning Quarter 1 Performance Report 2024-25 |
| Date: | 4 September 2024 |
| Report on behalf of: | Cllr Sheron Wilkie, Portfolio Holder for Place |
| Part: | I |
| If Part II, reason: | N/A |
| Appendices: | Appendix 1 – Performance Report |
| Background papers: | |
| Glossary of acronyms and any other abbreviations used in this report: | None |

Report Author / Responsible Officer

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|-----------------------------|---|
| Corporate Priorities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A clean, safe and enjoyable environment - Building strong and vibrant communities - Ensuring economic growth and prosperity - Providing good quality affordable homes, in particular for those most in need - Ensuring efficient, effective and modern service delivery - Climate and ecological emergency |
| Wards affected | All |

| | |
|--|---|
| Purpose of the report: | 1. To set out the performance outturn for the service for Quarter 1 of 2024-25. |
| Recommendation (s) to the decision maker (s): | 1. That the report is noted. |
| Period for post policy/project review: | |

1. Introduction

1.1 This report presents the performance outturn for the Planning service for the first quarter (April - June) the business year 2024-25. The full performance report is at Appendix 1.

1.2 The performance report at Appendix 1 shows a total of 5 indicators.

Planning Applications Determined Within Target

1.3 The percentage of all planning applications determined within target (DMP01) sits at 84%, against a target of 70%. This percentage is a very slight drop from Q4, which was 86%. However, it is higher than Q1 last year, which was 76%. This represents sustained overall good performance from the team, particularly given the ongoing restrictions relating to the Chiltern Beechwoods SAC and the introduction of mandatory biodiversity net gain. These figures include applications that were granted with an agreed extension of time. The next quarter's figures will begin to show the impact of no longer seeking extensions of time for householder planning applications.

1.4 In the last quarter the pressure on the team has been at Manager level, where due to maternity leave and a vacancy Manager capacity was 0.6 FTE rather than the expected 2.6 FTE for sustained periods.

1.5 Major planning application dropped from 100% to 75% as one of the four Majors determined during Q1 was determined out of time. This performance remains well in excess of the target 60%. It is also worth highlighting that the number of Majors being received at application and pre-application stages is showing a noticeable upturn.

1.6 As for Minors and Others, they performed in Q1 as follows, against a 70% target:

| MONTH | MINORS (%) | OTHERS (%) |
|--------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| April 2024 | 71.4 | 87.5 |
| May 2024 | 74.1 | 88.1 |
| June 2024 | 69.7 | 91.2 |
| TOTAL Q1 | 71.2 | 88.8 |

1.7 Minors remained above the target 70% for the quarter overall, though went very slightly below in June. In respect of Others (i.e. householders) the performance was well above target, and with an upward trend so that by the end of the quarter performance had exceeded 90% - a fantastic achievement. This has been the result of a continued focus on fast-tracking these applications when possible and also recognition that the vacancies within Planning Officer had been filled and the fast learning demonstrated by our two Trainee Planning Officers. Overall, looking forward, it is expected that Q2 will not be see such high levels sustained as firstly, a Planning Officer has left the Council and secondly, the decision to no longer seek Extensions of Time for householder planning applications (anticipating similar proposals from Central Government in this regard) could see performance slip slightly.

Enforcement Site Visits

1.8 The percentage of all planning enforcement priority first site visits (PE04) has gone up to 94.7% against a

target of 100%. This compares to 78.4% for Q4 and 65.8% for Q1 last year. The additional resources from Reserves for the Enforcement team have enabled them to continue to lower total live caseload (it currently sits at 272) and to visit the backlog cases where case received were initially held in abeyance whilst capacity came on stream. Currently, there is no enforcement backlog, which means that all cases can be visited within expected timeframes.

- 1.9 Drilling a little further, it is worth highlighting that two out of two P1 cases, i.e. 100% were visited in time. For priority 2 cases the figure is 88.1%, whereas for priority 3 cases it is 98.5% (i.e. only one out of 69 priority 3 cases were not visited in time). Overall, this represents a significant turnaround in performance for the Enforcement service. In order to sustain this performance a decision has been made to temporarily not fill a Planning Officer vacancy to allow the additional Enforcement resource to continue for a further six months.
- 1.10 Furthermore, the Enforcement service remain focused on dealing with the most harmful breaches of planning control. A total of 6 formal Notices were served in the quarter (4 Enforcement Notices and 2 Temporary Stop Notices). (In addition, a further 4 Enforcement Notices were served in July alone). It is important for the Enforcement team to stagger such formal action to ensure sufficient capacity is available to defend appeals against such Notices, which occurs in most cases.
- 1.11 Finally, it is important to note that the Specialist Services Manager position has been vacant throughout the period of this report. The recruitment into this post is ongoing with interviews very recently completed. The filling of this post will provide additional capacity within this area of Development Management.

Affordable Housing

- 1.12 Over the period 2023/24, 228 affordable homes were started (Indicator DO1) and 218 completed (Indicator DO2). The table below shows the previous five years data for context;

| | DO1 | DO2 |
|-------|-----|-----|
| 23/24 | 228 | 218 |
| 22/23 | 122 | 114 |
| 21/22 | 335 | 252 |
| 20/21 | 156 | 186 |
| 19/20 | 162 | 162 |

Retail Properties

- 1.13 For indicator CPE01 – the number of retail properties (vacancy rate) for the period – there is no data on this for the period as we are reliant on external parties. This will be reported at the earliest opportunity.

Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace

- 1.14 Officers are reviewing the types of development Council Strategic SANG will be allocated to and will be updating the allocations protocol within the Chilterns Beechwoods SAC Mitigation Strategy. This need has arisen as the number of new homes the Council’s Strategic SANG can now provide mitigation for has reduced over time, as capacity has been allocated to development. The review will ensure that capacity is safeguarded for the types of development that are most in need of Strategic SANG and those that will deliver the Council’s priorities. In the meantime, an early warning notification has been published on the Council’s website highlighting that due to reduced supply, capacity issues may arise, and that the allocations protocol is being reviewed. As the Council brings forward further Strategic SANG sites this position will be reconsidered.
- 1.15 The Box Moor Trust continues to work with DBC and both respective legal advisors on an agreement which can be used between the Box Moor Trust, applicants and DBC to allow the Box Moor Trust to provide SANG credits for development sites within the catchment area of Westbrook Hay. This is good news for the future

supply of SANG in the borough.

- 1.16 The new SANG Delivery Officer is progressing works at Bunkers Park and will be liaising with stakeholders of Chipperfield Common regarding works to the ponds on the common. Advice has been sought on the process for applying for commons consent for relevant works at Chipperfield Common.
- 1.17 Officers are continuing to work on the SANG management plan for Margaret Lloyd Park. This will incorporate an extension to the existing park, delivered through the adjacent Marchmont Farm development. Once the first draft management plan is complete, engagement with Ward Members will be undertaken.
- 1.18 An update on planning applications proposing SANG is below.
 - 23/02972/MFA Planning application for the change of use from agricultural land to Suitable Accessible Natural Green Space (SANG), together with a vehicular access, car park, paths, fencing and landscaping at Castle Hill Berkhamsted Hertfordshire – DMC resolved to grant permission on 11 July 2024. This decision is now pending a Section 106 legal agreement.
 - 23/02508/MFA Planning application for the change of use from agricultural land to a Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) together with provision of a new car park at Haresfoot Farm (Commercial) Chesham Road Berkhamsted Hertfordshire HP4 2SU – was recommended to grant planning permission and DMC resolved to grant planning permission at DMC in April 2024. This decision is now pending a Section 106 legal agreement.
 - 24/01593/MFA Planning application for the change of use from agricultural land to Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) with associated access and car park at Land East Of Green Lane Gaddesden Lane Gaddesden Row Hemel Hempstead Hertfordshire. Application validated 16 July and pending decision.
 - 24/01239/MFA Planning application for Change of use from agricultural land to Suitable Alternative Natural Green Space (SANG), together with a vehicular access, car park, paths, fencing and landscaping at Land Nettleden Road Potten End Berkhamsted Hertfordshire. Application validated 6 June 2024 and pending decision.

2. Options and alternatives considered

2.1 Not applicable.

3. Consultation

- 3.1 James Doe – Strategic Director (Place)
- 3.2 Diane Southam – Assistant Director, Place Communities and Enterprise
- 3.3 Philip Stanley - Interim Head of Development Management
- 3.4 Ian Ross – head of Neighbourhood Delivery
- 3.5 Ronan Leydon – Team Manager, Strategic Planning

4. Financial and value for money implications:

Financial

4.1 None arising from decisions on this report though the financial indicators for Planning fees report an under

recovery of income against target levels.

Value for Money

4.2 None arising from this report.

5. Legal Implications

5.1 None arising from this report.

6. Risk implications:

6.1 None arising from this report. Risks addressed through service level risk register.

7. Equalities, Community Impact and Human Rights:

7.1 Community Impact Assessment - Not applicable for this report.

7.2 Human Rights – There are no Human Rights Implications arising from this report.

8. Sustainability implications (including climate change, health and wellbeing, community safety)

8.1 None arising from this report.

9. Council infrastructure (including Health and Safety, HR/OD, assets and other resources)

9.1 None arising from this report.

10. Conclusions:

10.1 Not applicable

Appendix 1 - Performance Report (attached separately)

