



CAI.28 16/17

Challenge and Improvement
Committee

Date 11 October 2016

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Subject: Development Management Team update covering performance, staffing and income

Report by:

Chief Operating Officer

Contact Officer:

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Purpose / Summary:

To provide members with an update on performance, staffing and fee income in the Development Management Team.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- (a) That members note the contents of this report and support the continued changes within the Development Management section to sustain an improved service delivery; and
- (b) That a final update report be received in 6 months time, after which time performance for the service will be reported through the usual progress and delivery reporting mechanism.

IMPLICATIONS

Legal: none arising from this report.

Financial : The projected increase in fee income outlined in this report represents additional income into the DM team that can be reinvested to ensure that the service is operated on a cost recovery basis.

Staffing : As outline within this report additional staffing has been considered and vacant positions backfilled.

Equality and Diversity including Human Rights : n/a

Risk Assessment : n/a

Climate Related Risks and Opportunities : n/a

Title and Location of any Background Papers used in the preparation of this report:

Call in and Urgency:

Is the decision one which Rule 14.7 of the Scrutiny Procedure Rules apply?

i.e. is the report exempt from being called in due to urgency (in consultation with C&I chairman)

Yes

No

Key Decision:

A matter which affects two or more wards, or has significant financial implications

Yes

No

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 As members will be aware there have been a number of changes made to the Development Management team throughout this year following the Peer Review commissioned by the Council in 2015. The two main priorities for the team are to: i) implement measures to significantly improve performance, and ii) stabilise the staffing structure to create and resilient planning service.
- 1.2 At the end of April 2016 following an internal review of resources and a restructure of the existing management structure within the different planning teams, Oliver Fytche-Taylor was appointed as the Planning Services Manager, bringing together the Strategic Planning and Development Management functions into one role.
- 1.3 There have been a number of further changes to support officer resources within the team, as detailed later in this report, to respond to the highest number of applications the service has experienced for many years.
- 1.4 Performance has seen a substantial improvement throughout the year to date and this has been sustained, and improved upon further, month on month. In parallel to delivering the much improved service through 2016 the section has experienced both a surge in application numbers overall, and a notable increase in particularly large and complex applications.
- 1.5 This reflects the upturn in development interest within the district, supported by the Council's ambitious growth agenda and emerging local plan, and accordingly has ensured that the budgeted income from planning fees has been exceeded consistently throughout the start of this financial year.

2.0 Performance

- 2.1 One of the highest priorities in the past few months has been to ensure that the performance monitoring undertaken accurately reflects the progress being made and to put in place a robust process for reviewing performance in future, something that had not previously happened consistently and a key recommendation from last year's Peer Review.
- 2.2 Figures published by DCLG covering the period January to March 2016 have been rechecked following concerns that these did not accurately present the progress being made within the section at the start of the year.
- 2.3 As a result of those enquiries it has been established that whilst the performance data presented to members in Progress and Delivery reports was generally accurate, the separate quarterly returns to DCLG were not. This was a result of the current software being unfit for purpose and the loss of technical skills to undertake the analysis stemming from the high staff turnover in the team.
- 2.4 The detailed review was completed in August 2016 and found that the published quarterly return understated performance in respect of the number of applications being determined within prescribed time limits, and in doing so did not reflect the extent of changes within the team and the improving level of service. Effectively this meant that a significantly higher number of applications had been determined on time within that period that had been formally reported.

2.5 Corrected performance data for the period January to March was provided to DCLG, who allow for such amendments to be made, and they have since confirmed that their published reports will be amended accordingly. This is shown in Table 1.

2.5 **Table 1 – Development Management Performance January to March 2016**

Application Type	Actual Performance Data 1st Jan – 31st Mar 2016	(Original figures published by DCLG)
Major	13 out of 15 determined in time, or 87%	20%
Minor	57 out of 86 determined in time, or 66%	28%
Other	91 out of 97 determined in time, or 94%	74%

2.6 **Current Position**

2.7 Work to develop and introduce new IT software in planning has now commenced, and this will be a key part of ensuring that robust reporting can be provided in future. The new system is planned to go live in early 2017. In the interim the Planning Services Manager will continue to work directly with the Business Improvement Team Manager to ensure data is extracted and checked manually, before it is approved and shared with members or DCLG. The Core Management Team will continue to oversee this progress.

2.8 Improvements have been made to the existing system as a temporary measure to provide a live list of applications for officers to ensure that performance management is embedded in the service. This has delivered immediate improvements with a far higher focus on ensuring applications are determined within agreed timescales.

2.9 The high number of older applications has been a key focus for officers and the majority of these have been resolved. Any remaining older applications now have agreed time extensions in place, which is the correct governance procedure to allow for proper scrutiny of applications until a decision can be made.

2.10 The performance achieved at the start of the year has been sustained and improved upon significantly in the first quarter of 2016/17, covering the period April to June this year. This is a particularly commendable achievement when considering that the number of decisions issued in that time also increased by nearly 25%, from 198 in January to March to **244** decisions issued in Apr-Jun, despite an overall reduction in officer resources. Quarter 1 performance is shown in Table 2 and when the next DCLG data is published it is anticipated to show that West Lindsey's planning team is now ranked amongst the top quartile nationally (from lowest quartile last year).

2.11 **Table 2 - Development Management Performance April to Jun 2016**

Application Type	DM Performance Data 1st Apr – 30th Jun 2016
Major	16 out of 19 applications determined in time, or 84%
Minor	72 out of 83 applications determined in time, or 86%
Other	139 out of 142 applications determined in time, or 98%

2.12 During April to June this year, as could reasonably be expected to occur in parallel to positively transforming performance in this way, a further notable change has been the reduction in the number of complaints, coupled with a large increase in

compliments to the team. This has further enabled officers to focus their time on applications, rather than dealing with the effects of service failure.

- 2.13 The significant and sustained improvement has been reported to the Core Management Team and officers have been commended for their efforts in achieving such a positive turnaround of the services.

3.0 Staffing Update

- 3.1 To sustain the service improvements and performance the two important priorities in terms of staffing have been to stabilise and properly resource the existing Development Management section, then to assess what the needs are going forward. All of the changes identified below have been accommodated within the existing budget profile for the year and new appointments are planned to be entirely covered by the increased income in planning fees.

- 3.2 A number of vacancies existed within the section, notably a permanent Team Manager and Strategic Lead, as well as a number of officer vacancies. In terms of the latter, members will be aware of the significant reliance on interim agency staff to support the service in recent years, resulting in inconsistent service delivery, a high turnover of case officers and reputational damage arising from the resulting poor customer service.

- 3.3 Currently there is just one temporary Senior Officer working within the Development Management Team (reduced from 4.5 agency FTE's at the start of 2016), who is employed to deal specifically with a number complex cases and specialist appeals. As a result of the overall increase in planning applications, and particularly the sustained increase in the number of major planning applications being received, a new fixed term Senior Officer post has been approved (recruitment underway late September/early October) and a further Senior agency officer will be recruited specifically to cover the interim period whilst that recruitment is completed.

- 3.4 The new post of *Developer Contributions Officer* has also been successfully recruited to, and this now provides dedicated support to the team and the Council in developing, negotiating and monitoring the mechanism for securing S106 payments. This officer has now become the lead officer for the West Lindsey Community Infrastructure Levy, which members will be aware is currently under examination and planned to be adopted during early 2017.

- 3.5 Further officer resources have been built into the section through bolstered support in the Growth Team, which has provided capacity in the form of experienced officers able to deal with the delivery of the priority development sites (predominantly in Gainsborough), and then handling the major planning applications that follow. Such applications could otherwise (and often did in the past) typically take a planning officer 'offline' for a number of weeks to properly consider the application.

- 3.6 There is an outstanding requirement for an Assistant Team Manager, a new post agreed by CMT as part of the restructure of the team. This role responds to the increased size of the team following the merger of all planning functions into one section (it is now far larger than all other teams in the authority with the exception of Waste Services) and will assist the Planning Service Manager in the day to day running of the DM function. Once in post this officer will hold lead responsibility for closely monitoring and reporting performance. This dedicated support is planned to

be recruited to during October/November 2016 and be in place by the end of this calendar year.

3.7 Finally, all of the vacancies in the Technical Support team have now been filled and that team now operates at full capacity. Following a very high level of interest in the three positions available, the Senior Technical Officer (Maternity Cover), Support Officer and Technical Officer vacancies have all been filled.

3.8 Looking ahead

3.9 During the next few months there will be a number of heavy demands on the team that are of very high significance and district-wide importance, including;

- a number of major appeal hearings and public inquiries
- the Central Lincolnshire Local Plan examination in public
- the West Lindsey Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) examination in public
- an increasing number of all application types continue to be received, including several large residential applications
- further applications relating to the development of Gainsborough's Urban Extensions and Housing Zone sites

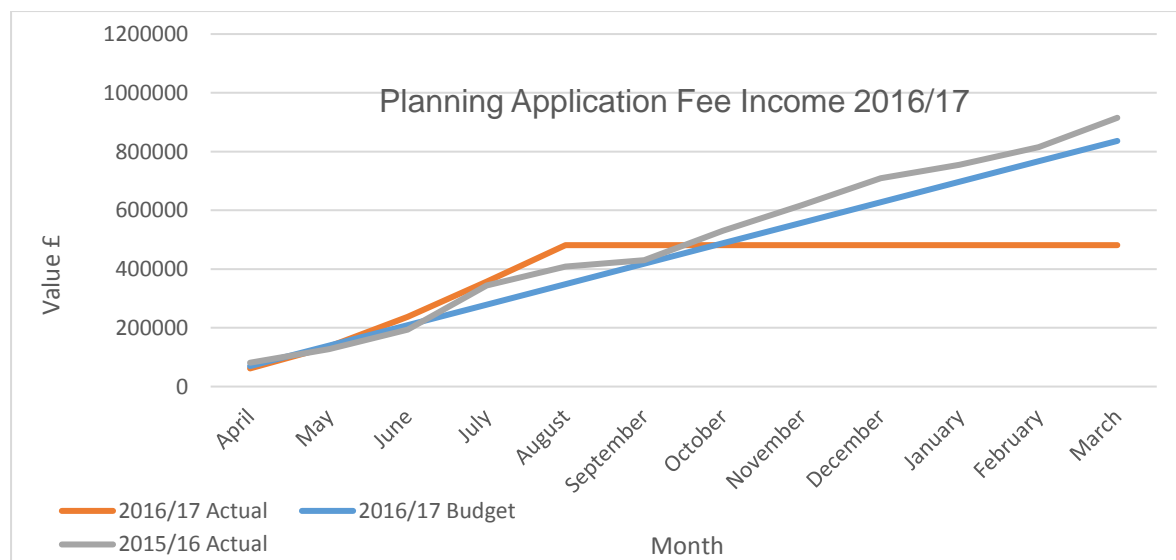
3.9 The resource changes outlined further above provide for a much more stable and resilient planning service that is now able to positively respond to these increased service demands and provide greater cover at periods of particularly high demand.

4.0 Planning Fees

4.1 As outlined in earlier sections of this report the increase in the quantum and form of applications received in the year to date has directly influenced planning fee income.

4.2 As shown in Table 3 income this year has been consistently higher than the same period last year and continues to exceed projected monthly income. At the end of August 2016 actual income from fees was £481,390, against a budget target of £348,612, representing an increase against the profiled budget income of £132,778.

4.3 **Table 3 – Planning Application fee income 1st April to 31st August 2016**



4.4 Whilst income cannot be directly controlled by the Council, the wider regeneration and spatial planning agendas are promoting the district for growth and this, coupled with the additional confidence of a newly adopted local plan, is likely to ensure that the current workload and additional income will continue well into 2017. In turn this will ensure that any additional resources required to keep up with these growing service demands can be covered on a cost-neutral basis to the authority.

5.0 Summary

5.1 This reports outlines the significant improvement to performance that has been achieved during 2016 and that continues to be enhanced further, month on month. Performance data for the current quarter will be available by the end of October and interim analysis indicates that the service is now maintaining a constantly high level of performance across all planning application types, exceeding the national targets. Maintaining performance at the current high levels is now an achievable and realistic target for the year ahead.

5.2 It is important to note that whilst these improvements have been swift and substantial, the service will remain fragile due to the exceptionally high level of demand placed upon it. Accordingly there needs to be constant focus on the level of staff resources in place and the efficiency of the service. It must be recognised and appreciated that further demands on staff time can have a very significant impact on performance and therefore carefully managing, and where necessary rationalising, the way that services are provided is an ongoing priority for the sections' management team.

5.3 Members will be aware that a number of changes to working practices have been introduced already. As well as maintaining and adding to these going forward, the launch of the new software in early 2017 will provide further opportunities to improve the service, especially around self-service and the ability to provide an improved level of live information on the status of planning applications to applicants, members and interested parties via the council's website.

5.4 Staff resources have been a key focus during recent months to ensure that vacancies have been backfilled in the most appropriate and cost effective way, and that use of officers time is optimised and prioritised to improve service delivery.

5.5 Feedback from customers, developers and potential investors has been extremely positive following the recent improvements, recognising the significant efforts made by planning officers to drive up and sustain the quality of the service provided.

5.6 Income continues to exceed budget forecasts and is likely to be higher by year end than the budget profile.

6.0 Recommendation

6.1 That members note the contents of this report and support the continued changes within the Development Management section to sustain an improved service delivery.