

PLANNING COMMITTEE

28 JUNE 2011

REPORT OF THE TEMPORARY HEAD OF PLANNING

A.3 **PLANNING SERVICES IMPROVEMENT PLAN - UPDATE**

(Report prepared by Clare David)

1. **Purpose of the Report**

- 1.1 To update Members of the Planning Committee on the progress made to date on the Priority 1 actions identified within the Planning Services Improvement Plan.

2. **Background**

- 1.2 The Planning Service has been the subject of a considerable number of service structure reviews and internal and external audits over the past few years. These have included, amongst others, the Audit Commission Review in 2009 and the Haslam Review in 2010. At its meeting on 10 November 2010 Cabinet approved a series of actions that in combination would implement the outcomes of all of these reviews.
- 1.3 Appendix 1 provides a comprehensive summary of those improvements identified by Cabinet as Priority 1 actions.
- 1.4 Priority 1 actions were to be completed within the first six months (i.e. by end of May 2011). There were 27 actions in this first period. All have been implemented and, of these, 19 actions (70%) have been completed and the remaining 8 actions (30%) are on-going (e.g. the series of Member development sessions and longer term projects such as the setting of local planning fees).
- 1.5 In 2009 Michael Haslam OBE BSc (Econ) MRTPI of Michael Haslam Associates Ltd was commissioned by the Council to consider the arrangements for reporting applications to the Planning Committee. The Haslam Review made a number of recommendations. These included follows:
- A revised standard framework was suggested for all future reports to Planning Committee to make them more focussed and to aid in the decision making process;
 - Consultation responses to be summarised rather than reproduced in full and to be addressed in the assessment section of the officers' reports;
 - Specialist design advice should be sought and appropriate resources allocated to the Planning Service for such advice;
 - Suggested conditions/reasons for refusal and Section 106 requirements to be summarised rather than reproduced in full;
 - A senior Member of staff to attend every Planning Committee to maintain consistency in advice and to assist the Chairman with running the meeting;
 - The Committee Procedures Note to be reviewed which, amongst other things, would allow Members' questions to be separated from the debate;
 - A standard procedure to be introduced for when Members wish to make a different decision to the officer recommendation;
 - Development sessions to be organised for Members on design issues;

- A reduction to the size of the Planning Committee; and
- An annual review to consider those applications where decisions have been made against the officer recommendation.

1.6 Other than the last item, which will be considered in the second round of improvements before the end of the year, all of these recommendations have been implemented. In addition, the frequency of Planning Committee meetings has been reviewed.

1.7 Some other Priority 1 actions of note include the following;

- The implementation of a Development Management approach to the Planning Service including a change of name from Development Control Committee to the Planning Committee
- Improvements to the function of Development Team
- Improvements to pre application advice offered by the service (including the introduction of pre application involvement by Members)
- A more proactive enforcement approach
- The revision of Planning Matters : Local Protocol for Councillors (that, amongst other things, introduced Planning Committee site visits to those items on the agenda).

1.8 Several other service improvements that were not originally identified in the Improvement Plan have also taken place. These include improvements to the web site; the third bi-annual Design Award; officers attending Parish Council planning meetings in relation to major developments; and the introduction of Workflow amongst others. A full update of all the Priority 1 actions is attached at Appendix 1. This provides a description of the action; the expected outcome and commentary on progress.

1.9 The service is committed to continuing the implementation of the Improvement Plan and will be rolling out a series of Priority 2 actions due for completion by December 2011. Members will be updated on progress at the end of the year.

3. **Recommendation**

3.1 **Recommendation: - That Members note the progress on the Improvement Plan Priority 1 actions that are contained at Appendix 1.**