

Cherwell District Council

10 December 2013

Update on Planning Enforcement Service

Report of Head of Development Management

This report is public

Purpose of report

At the Committee's request to update Members on the impact of the additional human resource added to this service.

1.0 Recommendations

The meeting is recommended:

- 1.1 To note this report.

2.0 Introduction

- 2.1 In October 2012 the Lead member for Planning, Head of Public Protection and Development Management, and Development Control Team Leader submitted an information document explaining the background to a recently completed review of the service. The review had concluded that, notwithstanding current budgetary pressures, some additional resource was necessary if the Council's enforcement function was to meet its targets and remain effective.
- 2.2 The proposed solution was to increase resources for a two year duration to be funded Planning Reserve fund. It was considered a measured response to the issue and allowed for further monitoring and review.
- 2.3 The Lead member for Planning advised the Committee that whilst planning enforcement was a discretionary service, the need to correct planning errors and strengthen the council's reputation as Local Planning authority was imperative.
- 2.4 In the minutes of this Committee it was recorded that the Committee was strongly of the view that any reduction in service provision, or even continuation of the status quo, would be counter productive for the District as a whole and for the credibility of the planning process in particular. The effective implementation of planning regulations and policy played a key role in ensuring the creation of a business friendly District of opportunity, and the proposals were fully supported.

3.0 Report Details

- 3.1 Following the usual recruitment processes the additional member of staff was in post from March 2013. However that Member of staff subsequently gained a permanent position as a member of the development control staff dealing with planning applications and appeals in late August 2013 and following a further recruitment process a new temporary member of staff will commence employment in this role on 16 December 2013.
- 3.2 Inevitably it takes a while for the new appointees to become fully accustomed to their new role, but given the background of the staff member appointed in March that did not take unduly long, and it is hoped that the educational background of the newly recruited post holder will similarly reduce the less productive period to a short time.
- 3.3 Unfortunately, as this Committee will know from previous reports concerning planning application performance it has been necessary to divert a part of this extra resource (either by using this extra person, or by using the Planning Investigator in post, and at times both) to support the planning registration process. This was done partly to ensure the more rapid registration of major applications, and more latterly to ensure that the accumulated backlog of registrations was eliminated. Again as previously reported I am happy to inform the Committee that this has now satisfactorily been dealt with and no enforcement resource is now being diverted.
- 3.4 As a consequence of the above factors it is difficult to give any meaningful statistics to demonstrate the effectiveness of introducing the additional resource. Sufficient to say that the enforcement section leaders report that at those times when the team has been fully resourced (as supplemented by the additional temporary post) the team has been able to ensure that first investigations have been undertaken into new complaints in a timely way and to reduce the previously climbing number of live cases.
- 3.5 At those times when the full 3.2 fte staff have been in place it has been possible to tackle long term complex cases and to do some initial work in planning revisions to the enforcement policy and new methods of working. It is anticipated that this necessary work will again be able to be done in an efficient way once the replacement temporary member of staff is bedded in.
- 3.6 With a full compliment of staff the levels of complaint about the speed of the service, and the impact upon staff, has been reduced to negligible and sustainable levels. Consequently we are confident that a) the extra staff resource was warranted and b) that with the 3.2 fte in place staffing levels would appear to be correct for the amount of incoming work. It is hoped that a prolonged period of adequate staffing will enable us to embark on a more proactive approach to enforcement as well.

4.0 Conclusion and Reasons for Recommendations

- 4.1 As noted in para 3.6 above I am satisfied that with the additional resource the service offered to complainants is has improved.. Any reduction however results in

a rapid increase in response times for initial investigation and in delayed detailed investigations.

5.0 Consultation

No consultation has been undertaken in the preparation of this report

6.0 Alternative Options and Reasons for Rejection

6.1 The following options have been identified and rejected for the reasons as set out below.

Option 1: To note the report.

Option 2: To request that this be added to the work programme for further monitoring. This is considered unnecessary as on the basis of the limited periods when full staffing has been in place it is clear that the service is performing adequately, and we now have the prospect of returning to that position.

7.0 Implications

Financial and Resource Implications

7.1 Financial Effects The temporary resource is funded for 2 years. At the termination of the temporary contract it will be necessary to consider whether this post has proved essential and whether therefore it would be necessary to consider a growth bid for future year.

Comments checked by Kate Drinkwater, Service Accountant,
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Legal Implications

7.2 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

Comments checked by: Nigel Bell, Team Leader – Planning and Litigation,
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Risk Implications

7.3 This report provides an update on the steps being taken to maintain and improve performance within planning enforcement. Poor performance in this area represents a reputational risk to the Council and the steps outlined in this report (i.e. to deploy additional enforcement resource) help to mitigate this risk.

Comments checked by:
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8.0 Decision Information

Wards Affected

All

Links to Corporate Plan and Policy Framework

The enforcement service has implications for the cleaner, greener and district of opportunity strategic priorities.

Lead Councillor

Councillor Michael Gibbard
Leader Member for Planning

Document Information

Appendix No	Title
None	
Background Papers	
None	
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