

## Quarterly report on Development Control Performance

### Development Control, item 6

**Committee:** Development Control

**Agenda Item**

**Date:** 22 February 2006

**6**

**Title:** Quarterly report on Development Control Performance

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Item for noting

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#### Summary

This report summarises the improvements that continue in the delivery of development control services since the end of 2003. It also makes reference to the draft outcome of an evaluation of the service carried out on behalf of the ODPM, to the success of the Council in handling appeals over the 6 months to the end of December 2005 and to the provisional award of planning delivery grant for the financial year 2006/7

#### Recommendations

That the improvements in service delivery, excellent appeals record and high development control element of Planning Delivery Grant be noted, and that a further report to address the issues of staffing and other matters be presented to this Committee after receipt of the final report of Consultants acting on behalf of the ODPM.

#### Background Papers

Letter from Lynda Addison Associates dated 11<sup>th</sup> January 2006 and accompanying draft evaluation

Table of appeals performance from the Planning Inspectorate

Provisional awards of Planning Delivery Grant 2006/7 from ODPM

#### Impact

Communication/Consultation	None at this stage
Community Safety	None
Equalities	None
Finance	None at this stage
Human Rights	None
Legal implications	None

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Ward-specific impacts	All wards
Workforce/Workplace	None at this stage

#### Situation

1 As part of the move towards better performance management Members agreed to receive quarterly reports on speed of decision in Development Control. The attached graphs show quarterly performance for each of the three Best Value targets for speed of decision over the last three years. In addition the charts show the trajectories for performance improvement that are necessary to meet the Best Value targets by 2006/7, and performance in relation to those trajectories. The BV targets are to determine: 60% of major applications in 13 weeks, 65% of minor applications in 8 weeks and 80% of all other applications in 8 weeks. The Council is a Standards Authority for 2005/6 because of poor performance in handling major applications in 2003/4, but we have not been designated a Standards Authority for 2006/7.

2 The trajectories start from the last quarter of the financial year 2003-4, and the start point represents the average of performance up to that point, rather than the actual performance in that quarter. Members will recall that the Council has to share these trajectories with GoEast. It will be noted that performance exceeds the trajectories in all three categories, and continues to exceed the Best Value targets for all three categories of application. This follows the improvements in handling major applications by this Committee together with the changed delegation arrangements and improved performance management.

3 Although there has been a slight dip in performance this reflects the loss of 3 experienced staff in the last quarter of 2005. In January performance was 100% for major applications, 73% for minor applications and 95% for others. Recruitment and retention remains a key issue and this is discussed further below.

4 Members will be aware that, as a Standards Authority, we have been subject to evaluation by consultants acting on behalf of the ODPM. Their draft report was received on 11<sup>th</sup> January 2006. A full report will be brought to this Committee on receipt of the final evaluation report. Their judgement criteria assess an authority as being green, red or amber, as follows:

#### **Green:**

Green authorities will be those where satisfactory progress has been made in meeting and sustaining the performance standards and the national targets for 2005/06 such that the recommendation will be that ODPM acknowledge the progress and need take no further action.

#### **Amber:**

Amber authorities will be those where some progress had been made but where the authority's ability to meet the targets remains unproven. The recommendation will be that the ODPM continue to monitor the progress made.

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#### **Red:**

Red authorities will be those where there is real concern that the LPA is still falling short of meeting the Best Value development control performance standards set for 2005/06 and the probability of sustained continuing improvement achieving the national targets by March 2007 is yet to be demonstrated. The recommendation will be that an on site review should be undertaken to assess the situation and identify what support is required.

#### 5 The executive summary is as follows

##### Uttlesford District Council

##### Executive summary

Uttlesford District Council is a standards authority for 2005/06 because of its performance on major applications from July 2003 to June 2004. The authority is not proposed as a standards authority for 2006/07 but was previously a standards authority in 2003/04 but not in 2002/03 or 2004/05. Since April 2004 there have been clear signs of improvement in respect of major, minor and other applications and performance for the annualised period up to the end of Q2 of 2005/06 on major, minor and other applications had reached the 2005/06 standards and the national targets of 60%, 65% and 80%.

Officer caseloads are reducing but are still well above the guideline figure of 150 per annum. Other areas of work are also increasing e.g. appeals, and it would appear that the current high performance of the service is dependent on the use of additional resources over and above the staffing establishment. Sustainability of this level of resource is therefore a concern in the medium/long term in order to maintain the high performance. There is no backlog and the number of applications on hand at the end of each quarter has been reducing. The Service Improvement Plan produced at the end of 2003 was very detailed with a range of actions identified to support the achievement of the planning targets. In line with best practice it was resourced and monitored regularly but lacked measurable targets. The updated service plan proposed will need to continue to take the outstanding service improvements forward and ensure that the planned improvements continue to be resourced and have measurable targets.

##### RECOMMENDATION

##### GREEN

The local planning authority is congratulated on meeting the best value development control performance standards for 2005/06 in the first half of 2005/06. It is encouraged to sustain progress to achieve best value and meet the national targets of 60% in 13 weeks for major applications, 65% in 8 weeks for minor applications and 80% in 8 weeks for other applications to March 2007 and beyond.

6 Officers are pleased with the outcome, which justifies many months of hard work by Officers and Members, and follows on from being released from the requirement to share our trajectories with GoEast late last year. The body of the report acknowledges that Members have accepted the need to meet targets in a list of service improvements. The issue of staff resources is noted, and will be the subject of a further report as part of the budget setting cycle for 2007/8. In calculating their workload figures the Consultants disregard work that is outsourced

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to third parties: some 500 applications a year are handled by external consultants, together with some public inquiries and appeals, paid for by planning delivery grant. The grant ceases after 2007/8. However, by using external consultants the caseload per officer (fte) is around 150 per annum. Nevertheless there is a shortfall of three planning officer posts within the service. In addition, Members should be aware that staffing levels are being maintained by the use of Agency staff. Along with all other local authorities it has proved very difficult to recruit experienced planning officers. Further recruitment advertising will commence shortly. Capacity within the service is fragile.

7 The Service is experiencing an increasing number of appeals, partly as a result of a much stronger application of planning policy since the adoption of the Local Plan last year and partly as a result of the promise of a very high financial return on the grant of planning permission making the pursuit of an appeal a worthwhile gamble. Nonetheless, information released by the Planning Inspectorate shows that in the last six months over 30 appeals were determined and the Council was successful in 87% of cases. The national average is 66%. A high ratio of allowed appeals would indicate that the Council was refusing applications solely to meet targets whereas a successful appeal record is a clear indicator of the quality of the service, and Members will note from the report elsewhere on this agenda that we have been successful in 7 out of 8 appeals determined in January 2006.

8 In December the provisional awards for the development control element of Planning Delivery Grant were announced. This is based on a combination of factors, including meeting the BV109 targets and the extent of improvements in the nine months ending in June 2005. Uttlesford has been awarded £360,261 as the development control element of the grant. This is the highest award in Essex and 32<sup>nd</sup> highest in the country out of 405 eligible authorities. This does not include any amount that will be awarded for plan-making, being in an area of high housing demand and e-planning. Announcements on these elements will be made shortly.

### **Conclusion**

Improvements in the development control service continue with performance remaining above the standard that the Government want all authorities to achieve by March 2007, and the ODPM's consultants consider that the service has improved to the extent that the ODPM need take no further action. The Council is not a standards authority for 2006/7. The Council has had marked success with its appeal record, which demonstrates that there has been no loss of quality in achieving best value targets. Finally, the sustained improvements in service delivery have resulted in the Council being awarded the highest Planning Delivery Grant in Essex for development control performance. While concerns over staffing levels and recruitment and retention continue, and will be considered in a future report to this Committee, Officers and Members are to be congratulated on this performance to date.

### **Risk Analysis**

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No risk assessment is presented as this is a report for noting but a thorough risk assessment will be presented when reporting on the final ODPM report on the service.

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