

Committee:	Governance, Audit and Performance Committee	Date:	Thursday, 26 July 2018
Title:	Planning Peer Review Action Plan		
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Summary

1. During February 2018, the Planning Service (excluding Building Control) underwent a Peer Review to gauge the performance and quality of decision making. It identified and quantified issues relating to the way planning policy projects and development management cases are handled and made recommendations on how structures and procedures might be improved and simplified. The Peer Review was carried out by two consultants from The Planning Officer's Society Enterprises Ltd (POS).
2. Having considered the recommendations from POS, a Planning Service Action Plan has been prepared to implement the recommendations so that improvements to the overall Planning Service are implemented as soon as possible. A summary document is attached.
3. The Action Plan covers performance issues which forms part of Governance, Audit and Performance Committee. However, it also covers resource issues which will need to be considered by Cabinet and items relating to Planning Committee so the Action Plan will also need to be considered by Planning Committee.

Recommendations

4. That Governance Audit and Performance Committee approves the Planning Service Action Plan (relating to performance), summary appended to this report.

Financial Implications

5. By introducing more efficient and effective working practices, implementing the Action Plan will save resources overall. However, it is difficult to predict the specific financial benefits at this stage in the process. The Action Plan will be monitored to ensure that financial benefits are secured whenever possible, bearing in mind the needs of our customers at all times.

Background Papers

- The POS Peer Review Final Report can be found via this link.

Impact

Communication/Consultation	No specific implications
Community Safety	No specific implications
Equalities	No specific implications
Health and Safety	No specific implications
Human Rights/Legal Implications	No specific implications
Sustainability	No specific implications
Ward-specific impacts	No specific implications
Workforce/Workplace	The Action Plan will lead to more effective and efficient working practices.

Situation

- In the context of the Planning Service Peer Review, the Government White Paper 'Fixing our Broken Housing Market' allowed each Local Authority to increase the nationally set planning fee by 20% subject to Statutory Instrument. The additional fee income is for councils to invest in their planning department in order to help deliver houses. Cabinet subsequently agreed to increase Uttlesford's fees by 20% and so this additional charge has been in force since 17th January 2018
- Between January 17, 2018 and March 31st, 2018 20% of the application fees received equated to £28,000. This is not a typical quarter so it is anticipated that other quarters will have a proportionally higher rate. For April to June 2018, this figure was c. £45,000. The forecast for 2018/19 financial year has therefore been estimated at £150,000. However, it needs to be acknowledged that this can only be an estimate at this stage therefore the spending plan needs to be monitored in accordance with the level of fees coming into the Council. A breakdown of how this additional fee income could be spend is included within the appended Action Plan report
- The Review identified some 'main findings' including:

- Review the performance monitoring process to ensure that corporate, department and service priorities are regularly monitored at the appropriate level and to the right timescales.
- Quarterly monitoring of CLG current and proposed 'designation' criteria
- Regular reporting of key performance indicators to members
- Review the roles of the DM Manager and the Team Leaders to ensure their respective management and professional roles are clarified.
- The authority reviews the project management process (of the Local Plan) to ensure delivery while freeing up key resources for plan preparation.

10. The Final Report sets out best practice from other authorities, including:

- The need for an up to date, fully NPPF compliant Local Plan, reflecting corporate objectives, in place at the earliest convenience.
- a clearly expressed policy towards the use of S106 obligations setting out when they will be required, for what purpose and the necessary mechanisms to ensure delivery.
- an efficient proactive development management service that meets all statutory and local targets and offers good customer care and consistent planning advice, using up to date technology and delivering, enabling, monitoring and enforcing quality outcomes.
- adequate resources to deliver all of the above with less dependence on agency staff.

11. Subsequent to the Peer Review the Planning Service Management Team has compiled a draft Action Plan (a summary document is attached). This Action Plan aims looks at identifying efficiencies in the way our services are delivered. It also explores income generating opportunities across the Service.

12. As part of a wider corporate initiative, there will be a wider Planning Service Budget Review that will be focussed on overall resource requirements moving forward in line with the business plan commitments that have been identified for 2019/20 and beyond.

13. Overall outcomes of Peer Review Action Plan:

- Introduce smarter working processes
- Stop doing things we don't need to do
- Make efficiency savings wherever possible.
- Generate income wherever possible
- Improve overall customer experience (including developers, householders, Members, colleagues etc.)

- Improve Performance Management (aim for top quartile relating to national performance indicators)
- Reduce and manage work related pressures on staff
- Use IT to streamline services more where opportunities arise
- Create a Planning Service that is more effective and efficient.

14. Conclusions

15. The efficient and effective delivery of the Peer Review Action Plan is key to a successful, cost effective and customer focussed Planning Service for the future. It is clear from the Action Plan that the Planning Service needs to change the way it operates in certain areas. More efficient ways of working will mean doing less of the things that the Planning Service currently does – we need to stop doing tasks just because we have always done it that way. This sort of message needs to be communicated carefully and sensitively to our customers though so that those affected by changes in our services are fully aware in advance.
16. A smarter working service needs to focus on the priority areas that it needs to be delivering on. Our customers need to be at the centre of these priorities. Many services we currently deliver at no direct cost to the customer will need to be charged for or else not provided. A “Gold, Silver and Bronze” range of services needs to be considered so that our customers can access the level of service that suits their specific requirements. This approach to service delivery will be the focus of the Planning Service moving forward.
17. While the individual actions are allocated to team managers, it will be for the Assistant Director of Planning and Building Control to drive this overall agenda forward.

Risk Analysis

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigating actions
Members do not support the Planning Service Action Plan	1 – The Action Plan is based on the findings of a Peer Review	3 – If the Planning Service is to operate more efficiently, actions are needed to change the	Consider the needed for a reviewed Action Plan that addresses any concerns members have with the Plan appended to this report

	by the highly regarded Planning Officers Society	way we work and resource services. The Action Plan identifies mechanisms for doing this.	
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1 = Little or no risk or impact

2 = Some risk or impact – action may be necessary.

3 = Significant risk or impact – action required

4 = Near certainty of risk occurring, catastrophic effect or failure of project.