

Report to: **Overview and Scrutiny (Internal) Committee**

Date: **18 April 2017**

Title: **Planning Peer Challenge Action Plan Update**

Portfolio Area: **Customer First – Cllr Jeff Moody**

Wards Affected: **All**

Relevant Scrutiny Committee: **N/A**

Urgent Decision: **N** Approval and clearance obtained: **Y**

Date next steps can be taken: in line with Action Plan
(e.g. referral on of recommendation or implementation of substantive decision)

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RECOMMENDATIONS:

That the Panel:

- 1. Note the progress made in implementing the Peer Challenge Action Plan, and**
- 2. Make any recommendations for further improvements within the planning function.**

1. Executive summary

1.1 The report outlines progress with implementing the Peer Review Action Plan arising from the Planning Peer Challenge Visit conducted between 18th and 20th April 2016.

1.2 Effective Development Management supports the Councils priorities and objectives and also supports the local economy.

2. Background

2.1 During 2015 and 2016 performance within the Development Management service had been adversely affected by a number of internal and external factors. In order to take an objective view of the function, the Council invited the Local Government Association (LGA) and the Planning Advisory Service (PAS) to undertake a planning improvement peer challenge.

2.2 The challenge took place during between the 18th and 20th April 2016 and many Members will have had input to the process. In addition staff, Parish and Town Councils, Developers, Agents and other Stakeholders were engaged.

2.3 The Report identified a number of key areas where improvements could be made. As a result, a comprehensive Action plan was developed which included actions, timescales and responsible officers.

2.4 It was agreed that the Action Plan would be owned and developed by the Planning and Licensing Committee and that key performance data would be reported to them on a monthly basis.

2.5 In addition performance against the Plan would be monitored by the Overview and Scrutiny (Internal) Committee on a quarterly basis.

3. Outcomes/outputs

3.1 The Peer Challenge Report provided a comprehensive assessment of the Councils planning function and identified both the strengths and areas for improvement.

3.2 The development, implementation and ongoing monitoring of a robust Action Plan by the Planning and Licensing Committee in order to address the findings and key recommendations of the Report will ensure that improvements are delivered.

4. Action Plan Update

4.1 An update version of the Action Plan is attached at Appendix 1 which outlines progress against each of the agreed actions. Members will note that progress has been generally good across the board with the only exception being Actions A19-21 which have been delayed due to resources but are now in hand.

4.2 The Agents Forums re-introduced as a result of the review have proved to be very popular. Three joint South Hams and West Devon

events have been held at the Watermark Centre in Ivybridge and have been well attended by individual Agents and volume house builders alike. As a result of the forums we have introduced an Agents Hotline hosted by Case Management, the ability to upload plans and supporting documents directly through the website and held technical sessions around drainage requirements.

4.3 Another key function of the forums has been the introduction of the Specialists and Case Managers to the Agents. This has engendered better working relationships and allowed cases/issues to be discussed and resolved in an informal setting.

4.4 Recruitment of permanent staff still remains a challenge locally and nationally. In order to look ahead we are exploring apprenticeships and placements with universities to try and attract officers with a planning background to the area.

4.5 The challenge of reducing the 'out-of-time' applications remains. Whilst the number has reduced markedly, it has been recognised that further dedicated resource is necessary. Subject to confirmation, an experienced officer is being brought in on a six month contract to tackle these cases whilst permanent staff can focus on newer cases. This will be funded within the existing specialist establishment.

4.6 New powers allowing Councils to increase planning application fees are likely to come into place in the late summer. Councils were invited to apply to increase their fees by 20%, which we have done, and the resulting income must be ring-fenced for supporting delivery of the planning function. Officers are presently determining where that resource could be best utilised to secure further improvement in planning performance and wider economic benefits.

5. Summary and Conclusions

5.1 Delivery against the agreed Action Plan is progressing well and overall performance of the service is good. There are still areas for further improvement and the potential, through powers to increase fees, to secure additional focused resources is being explored and will be the subject of a future report to Members

6. Implications

| Implications | Relevant to proposals Y/N | Details and proposed measures to address |
|------------------|---------------------------|---|
| Legal/Governance | Y | The Council Constitution includes the provision for the Overview and Scrutiny (Internal) Committee to |

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| | | set its own work programme. In so doing, the Committee has requested receipt of this report. |
| Financial | N | There are no significant financial implications directly related to this service update report. |
| Risk | Y | There are well rehearsed reputational risks associated with the performance of the Development Management Service. Whilst there have been a number of factors that have previously had an adverse impact on the service, this report evidences that performance is improving. |
| Comprehensive Impact Assessment Implications | | |
| Equality and Diversity | N | There are no equality and diversity implications directly related to this report. |
| Safeguarding | N | There are no safeguarding implications directly related to this report. |
| Community Safety, Crime and Disorder | N | There are no community safety or crime and disorder implications directly related to this report. |
| Health, Safety and Wellbeing | N | There are no health, safety and wellbeing implications directly related to this report. |
| Other implications | N | N/A |

Supporting Information

Appendices:

Appendix 1: Peer Challenge Action Plan (update March 2017)

Background Papers:

Planning Improvement Peer Challenge – Final Report June 28 2016