

Report to: **Overview and Scrutiny Panel**
Date: **27 February 2020**
Title: **Development Management – Performance Update**
Portfolio Area: **Deputy Leader – Cllr Bastone**
Wards Affected: **All**
Urgent Decision: **N** Approval and clearance obtained: **Y**
Date next steps can be taken: **N/A**

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Recommendations:

That the Overview and Scrutiny Panel note the Performance Update and the impact of the additional Specialist Officer resource.

1. Executive summary

- 1.1 Following a recommendation by the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Panel and Development Management Committee at its meeting held on 24 January 2019 and the approval by the Council at its meeting held on 21 February 2019 (Minute Ref: 63/18(h)) an additional Specialist Officer resource was recruited to the Development Management Service.
- 1.2 Following the approval of the additional Specialist, a further service capacity review was requested to be undertaken and reported to the Overview and Scrutiny Panel six months after the additional Specialist was in post. This report sets out the current position.
- 1.3 Overall there has been a measurable improvement in performance of the Development Management service, part of which is due to process improvements and part of which is as a result of the additional Specialist. Recognition must also be given to the Urban Fringe Team that continues to manage and effectively process planning applications for the Sherford Development and is now managing the major Woolwell application as well as other

developments within the urban fringe. This ensures that the capacity of the Development Management Team can be focussed on the rest of the workload.

- 1.4 Continued effective Development Management is essential to the reputation of the Council.

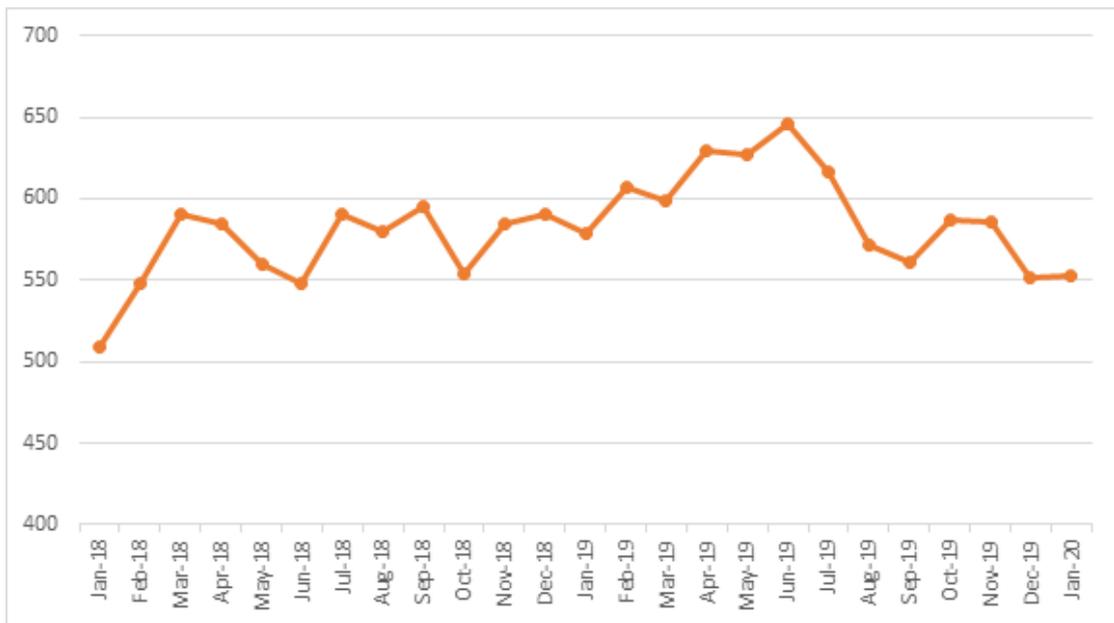
2. Background

- 2.1 At its meeting on 1 November 2018, the Overview and Scrutiny Panel considered the Performance Measures for Quarter 2 in 2018/19 (Minute O&S.65/18 refers). In so doing, a detailed debate took place and a number of concerns were raised. As a way forward, the Panel agreed that a 'Development Management Performance Review' should be given formal consideration at the joint meeting of the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Panel and Development Management Committee at its meeting held on 24 January 2019.
- 2.2 The report to the Joint Committee meeting set out that whilst there had been improvements in the Development Management service, there were a number of factors that needed to be addressed:
 - Resourcing of suitably qualified/experienced staff;
 - Reduction of the number of live applications; and
 - Improvements in the efficiency of process and a more proactive approach to keeping relevant parties informed of progress.
- 2.3 As a result, authority was given for an additional Specialist post shared with West Devon, to be included on the establishment, and the post was successfully recruited to. The additional member of the team helped to achieve improved performance for the service as a whole.
- 2.4 Progress has now been made against all three of the above factors. There is still a national shortage of qualified planning officers and it is challenging to recruit planning staff. This is not an issue specific to South Hams but at a National level. As previously reported to Members, steps have been taken to upskill existing staff into the Development Management specialism. One of the existing Specialists is attending the Planning Masters course at Plymouth University and the expectation is that one of the existing case managers will be starting the course this September. In addition we have a shared planning apprentice with Teignbridge Council and the Dartmoor National Park Authority. In time it is hoped that we can develop our own staff so as not to be reliant on outside recruitment.
- 2.5 As set out below there has been a reduction in the number of live planning applications and an improvement in the speed of

determination, with an increase in the number of decisions made within the target time without extensions of time.

3. Outcomes

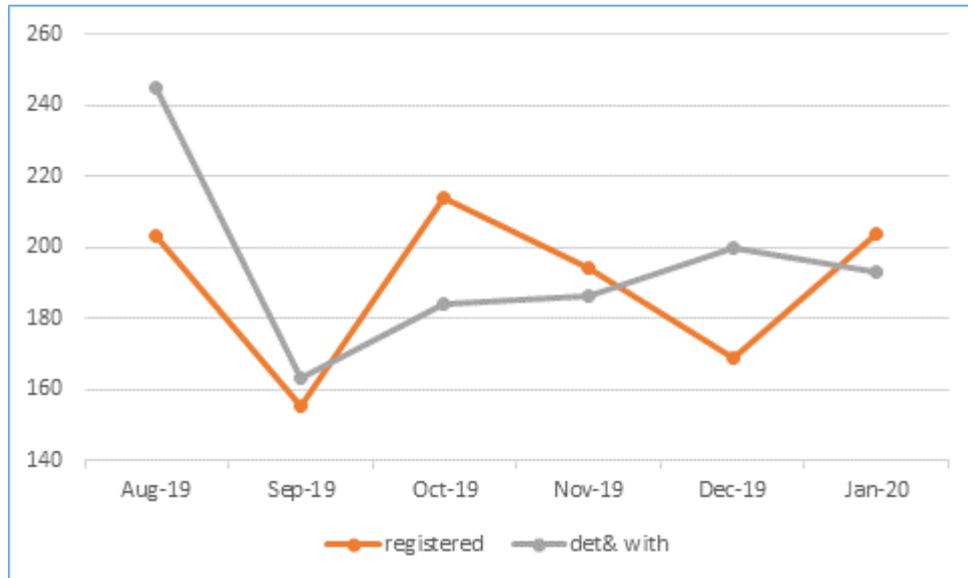
3.1 The following three tables indicate that there has been an improvement in performance. The first table is the number of live applications since the start of 2018 and demonstrates that following an increase in live applications in 2018 there is steady downward trend in the number of live applications in 2019 from a peak of 650 to 550.



3.2 Over the last 4-5 years the volume of non-major applications that are received by the Development Management Team is very consistent being around 3,000. The permanent Development Management Team structure consists of 16.75 FTE of which 2.5 FTE primarily deal with Major applications leaving 14.25 to deal with the majority of the cases. This equates to an average of some 210 applications per officer annually which is an average case load of between 35-40 applications at any one time per officer. This is considered to be an acceptable level. The permanent structure of the service does have the capacity to deal with the workload.

3.3 At present, the average caseload is slightly higher at some 40-45 which is higher than planned for but this is mainly due to current staff turnover as set out in 4.2 below and is not considered to be the result of insufficient capacity within the team structure. Once the vacancies are filled, it is expected that the average numbers will fall back to an average of 35-40 cases per officer at any one time.

3.4 The table below shows applications received and determined/withdrawn since August 2019. On average, we received 189 applications per month and 196 applications were either determined or withdrawn. Whilst there is only a slight difference between applications received and determined/withdrawn it is gradually resulting in a reduction in the number of live applications.



3.5 The final table is the main government measure of Local Planning Authority Development Management performance which is the percentage of applications determined within the statutory time targets or within a timescale agreed with the applicant. The red line is the performance against this government target and the blue line is the percentage of applications determined within the target time without extensions of time. The additional Specialist has helped this measure retain an upward trend.



4. Options available and consideration of risk

- 4.1 The performance of the Development Management Service is important to the Council for reputation and financial reasons. The performance, since the last report to this Panel, has improved. This has, however, been during a period when the staff have been permanent employees, there have been no vacancies and no instances of significant illness.
- 4.2 Unfortunately, that is not the case at the present time. As Members will be aware, one of the two full time Senior Specialists has left the Council, a Specialist is now on an extended period of leave and a further Specialist is moving into Enforcement from 1st April, 2020. In addition, one of the Specialists is on a period of extended sickness leave. We are recruiting to replace the Senior Specialist and the Specialist who is moving into Enforcement and officers are hopeful that we will be successful. The post on extended leave has been filled on a temporary basis by recruiting an officer with previous experience of the authority. It is inevitable, however, that these changes will have an impact on performance, although all efforts will be made to minimise the impact.

5. Proposed Way Forward

- 5.1 That the performance of the Development Management service continues to be monitored.

6. Implications

Implications	Relevant to proposals Y/N	Details and proposed measures to address
Legal/Governance	Y	The Overview and Scrutiny Panel has the ability to set its own Work Programme and this update report has been prepared in response to a formal request from the Panel.
Financial implications to include reference to value for money	N	There are no direct financial implications of the contents of the report.
Risk		There are both reputational and financial risks associated with the performance of the DM service. Whilst there have been a number of factors that have previously had an adverse impact on the function, this report evidences that performance is improving.

Supporting Corporate Strategy		Council – delivering efficient and effective services.
Climate Change - Carbon / Biodiversity Impact		N/A
Comprehensive Impact Assessment Implications		
Equality and Diversity	N	N/A
Safeguarding	N	N/A
Community Safety, Crime and Disorder	N	N/A
Health, Safety and Wellbeing	N	N/A
Other implications	N	N/A

Supporting Information

Background Papers:

Agendas and minutes arising from the following meetings:

Joint meeting of the Panel and Development Management Committee held on 24 January 2019; and
Council meeting held on 21 February 2019.

Apppendices:

None