

Appendix 1

Planning Service Improvement Plan – Outline Measures

The measures set out in this document and the associated report are considered to be the key measures required in order to make significant improvements to the planning service as assessed through the Government's new performance framework. Officers will engage at the earliest opportunity with Government (and their representatives) to investigate the support that will be made available to designated authorities.

This document is not a full Improvement Plan and officers will continue to undertake a full and detailed assessment of historical performance data and then produce a full Improvement Programme that includes clear timescales and milestones for each measure and a trajectory and timetable for improvement with a prediction of when we expect to achieve the required levels of performance. The Improvement Plan cannot be completed at this stage because details continue to emerge about the new performance framework will be implemented.

Existing Measures

Finalise Implementation of the new structure for the Planning and Economic Development Group

In April 2013 the Council implemented of a revised structure for the Planning and Economic Development Group. The agreed Business Case and vision for the group, when fully implemented, will deliver a wide range of benefits and performance improvements. These improvements include the creation of a Major Schemes Officer post who now has responsibility for the coordination and effective project management of all major applications that are submitted to the Council.

The new structure will realise performance improvements particularly in relation to customer outcomes and enabling Economic Development however it will now also be necessary to ensure that the service is effectively resourced to deliver against the Government's new performance targets. This will be explored through the Systems Thinking review outlined below.

Proposed Measures

Corporate and Political Support

Government is clear in its objectives for local authority planning services and the emphasis of the new performance framework is that authorities are able to effectively manage local development proposals and enable growth and investment. These objectives will be achieved through the implementation of the measures set out in this report and other associated improvements. This process will not be successful unless the changes receive corporate and political support and therefore it is proposed that an internal working group chaired by the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Economic Development and

Housing Strategy is established for the year of designation in order to steer the improvement process.

ACTION 1: Establish a Planning Services Improvement Working Party consisting of key Members and officers to guide the improvement process proposed in this report

Encouraging Pre Application Negotiation (including agreement to a Planning Performance Agreement)

Pre application advice offers a chance to discuss and resolve issues that may extend the period for determination. It allows the planning authority to discuss parameters of applications, shape initial layouts and liaise, where necessary with statutory consultees. This practice helps streamline the application process and can potentially considerably improve the overall determination time.

It is at this time the developer should be encouraged to enter into a Planning Performance Agreement (PPA). These agreements allow for timescales to be set and continually monitored and allows for a revised timetable to be agreed which would extend the determination period and count towards the Councils on time figures.

At present, the Council charges for pre-application advice and receives an income stream of approximately £8,000 per annum. In return the Council commits to provide formal advice within ten days. Consequences of this approach include diverting officers from dealing with major applications, potentially encouraging applicants to submit applications without advice (thus lengthening the determination process) and limiting the opportunity to agree a PPA. Planning application income is sufficiently above budget targets for this year that any loss in income for this year that any loss in income will be balanced. The objective of a revised pre-application charging scheme will be to match the £8,000 income for 2014-15 through increasing such charges for major residential development proposals.

ACTION 2: Stop charging for pre-application advice with immediate effect and fully review the charging regime through a report to Cabinet by April 2014.

Decision Making

The role and function of Development Control Committee will inevitably be under closer scrutiny once the designation of the authority is confirmed. The authority is not currently at risk of designation on the basis of the quality of decision making though performance in this area remains weak. It is therefore proposed to review the Scheme of Delegation with a view to reducing the number of applications that are determined by Committee in order that the Development Control Committee can focus on Major applications where an improvement in performance is paramount.

It is also proposed to increase the provision of training to both officers and members and to consider options for involving Members and Parish Councils in the wider application process.

ACTION 3: Review the Scheme of Delegation as contained within the Council's Constitution in order to enable the majority of decisions to be made in a timely manner.

ACTION 4: Further emphasis on officer and Member training and involvement of Members (and Parish Councils) in pre-application discussions in order to improve the quality of decision making.

Encourage developers to enter into Planning Performance Agreements (PPAs)

Planning Performance Agreements were formally introduced into the planning system on 6 April 2008 and are about improving the quality of planning applications and the decision making process through collaboration. They bring together the Local Planning Authority (LPA), developer and key stakeholders at an early stage to work together in partnership throughout the planning process. They are essentially a collaborative project management process and tool that provide greater certainty and transparency to the development of scheme proposals, the planning application assessment and decision making. The potential role of PPAs has been referenced in the National Planning Policy Framework to help guide positive pre-application collaborative working.

The new Planning Performance Regime allows major applications to be determined outside of the target timeframes without penalty where they are subject to a PPA or where the timescales for determination have been agreed in writing.

ACTION 5: Seek to formally agree realistic timescales for the determination of all major applications. Officers will investigate the extent to which this approach can be required of developers.

Systems Thinking Process Review

The Council has previously undertaken a Systems Thinking Intervention into the Planning Service however it is widely acknowledged that the Intervention has not been fully effective. Since the intervention the service has been through a period of very significant demand (such as the Lubbethorpe application and production of the Core Strategy) and has had a varying level of resources available. An initial assessment of the systems and processes currently in use within the service can be significantly improved and streamlined.

The Objective of any intervention must be in line with the Council's corporate philosophy of Systems Thinking and should focus on delivering good outcomes for our customers at the same time as achieving the necessary

performance targets. There are other planning authorities who have effectively implemented Lean Systems reviews and deliver these combined objectives and that should be the aim for Blaby.

ACTION 6: Undertake a full Systems Thinking process review of the planning application service and redesign processes to meet the ambitions of the Council.

Planning Obligations

Finalising S106 Agreements for major applications is one of the main areas which causes a delay in the determination of applications. One of the concerns raised by Local Authorities in response to the original Government consultation on this matter was that developers could cause a delay in the processing of applications through control of the S106 process. In response the DCLG has indicated that for applications which are submitted directly to the secretary of state, developers will be encouraged to submit a worked up agreement when applying and applications will be refused if agreements are not finalised within prescribed timescales.

In addition to changing procedures to streamline the administrative process of planning obligations, it will also be necessary to review the Council's planning policies on this matter in order to ensure that the as many of the contributions as possible are standardised and individual negotiations are limited.

The delays caused by this element of the application process would be reduced by the introduction of the Community Infrastructure Levy as it would significantly reduce the level of agreements that will be necessary. Officers continue to investigate this subject and expect to report to Cabinet in November.

ACTION 7: Review and revise Council policies and procedures in relation to planning obligations in order that this element of the determination process is streamlined.