

SOUTH STAFFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

INFORMATION REPORT

PLANNING COMMITTEE ACTION PLAN 2016/17 - QUARTER 4 REPORT

**JOINT REPORT OF CHAIRMAN OF PLANNING COMMITTEE & CHIEF
PLANNING OFFICER**

Date: 16 May 2017

PART A – SUMMARY REPORT

1. SUMMARY OF PROPOSALS

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to set out our performance against the measures contained within the Planning Committee Action Plan 2016/17. In addition, Members are invited to agree an Action Plan for 2017/18.
- 1.2 Our performance with regard to Major planning applications justifies particular attention. The Quarter 4 figure of 100% determined within 13 weeks, or at a later time agreed with applicants, is significantly above the Government's target of 60%. The annual out-turn figure for 2016/17 is 97%.
- 1.3 The Government has now brought Minor applications within the performance regime (where designation can be applied to local planning authorities with poor performance). We achieved 84% for Minor applications in Quarter 4 and this exceeds the Government's target of 65%. The annual out-turn figure for 2016/17 was 72%.
- 1.4 Our performance for Householder/Other applications in Quarter 4 was 91% against the Government's target of 80%. The annual out-turn figure for 2016/17 was 84%.
- 1.5 Members will note that our performance figure across all 3 categories of planning application was 89% for Quarter 4. The annual out-turn for 2016/17 was 80%. Members will be aware that the Government places local planning authorities into special measures ('designation'), if less than 50% of Major applications are determined within the agreed timescales. This now also applies to Minor applications (however the Government recently chose not to implement the sanctions until early 2018). In addition to this speed measure there is also a quality measure relating to appeal outcomes. Members will be pleased to note that our performance is significantly better than the standards set for 'designation'.

2. PROPOSED DECISION BY PLANNING COMMITTEE

- 2.1 Planning Committee is invited to note the performance in Quarter 4 of the Action Plan as set out at Appendix A and also to note the annual out-turn for 2016/17.
- 2.2 Planning Committee is invited to agree an Action Plan for 2017/18.

3. SUMMARY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

POLICY/COMMUNITY IMPACT	Do these proposals contribute to specific Council Plan objectives?	
	Yes	Objective 2: A Safe & Sustainable District – Protect the Green Belt, ensure a safe and clean environment and aim to provide homes that people need.
	Has an Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) been completed?	
	No	Not required
SCRUTINY POWERS APPLICABLE	No – This is a report prepared for the Planning Committee.	
KEY DECISION	No	
TARGET COMPLETION/ DELIVERY DATE	Not applicable	
FINANCIAL IMPACT	No	None.
LEGAL ISSUES	Yes	The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 states that local authorities need to have processes and procedures in place to secure continuous improvement. Performance against the Council Plan and the Government's national performance regime for planning are 2 ways of demonstrating this.
OTHER IMPACTS, RISKS & OPPORTUNITIES	None	
IMPACT ON SPECIFIC WARDS	No	

PART B – ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

4. INFORMATION

- 4.1 The overall aim of the Planning Committee Action Plan 2016/17 is to ensure that our Development Management (DM) Service is achieving the speed and quality measures that define good performance. Members will be aware of the Government's particular focus on speed at the national level. Locally, there are also important actions that add value to the customers' experience of our development management service. These are included as actions under Development Team Meetings and Information/Training.

- 4.2 Members will be aware that the Government has tightened-up the planning performance regime, so that local planning authorities making 50% or fewer of planning decisions on time are at risk of being designated as 'poor performers'. Members will be aware that 'designation' (potentially) removes decision making power from local councils and provides applicants with the opportunity to apply directly to the Planning Inspectorate (PINs) for their planning decisions – if they so choose. Members will also be aware that this now applies to Minor applications (although the Government has recently chosen not to impose this sanction in 2017 – and will review performance in early 2018).
- 4.3 It is encouraging to note that our performance for Major applications is particularly good. 100%, achieved for Quarter 4, is well above the statutory figure of 60%. The annual out-turn figure for 2016/17 is 97%. When the Government makes its assessment with regard to 'designation' for poor performance, it usually tracks a period of 2 years over which it requires all authorities to ensure that they achieve in excess of 50% determined within the time-frame. Looking back 2 years from this quarter [01 April 2015 – 31 March 2017], we have determined a total of 56 major planning applications and we have determined 54 within the required timeframe. This equates to 96%.
- 4.6 Regarding our performance for Minor applications, we have achieved, for Quarter 4, 84% within the agreed timeframe, which exceeds the Government's target of 65%. Annual out-turn figure for 2016/17 is 72%. The Government has now introduced 'designation' for poor performance in minor applications. We anticipate that a 2 year timeframe will be used to assess 'designation'. Looking back 2 years from this quarter [01 April 2015 – 31 March 2017], we have determined a total of 683 minor planning applications and we have determined 497 within the required timeframe. This equates to 73%.
- 4.7 For Householder/Other applications we have achieved 91% within the agreed timeframe, which exceeds the Government's target of 80%. Annual out-turn figure for 2016/17 is 84%. Whilst we understand that the Government does not intend to extend 'designation' to Householder/Other applications, it will be a good discipline to also track performance over the similar 2 year period because it shows the trend over a longer period of time. From 01 April 2015 – 31 March 2017, we have determined a total of 871 Householder/Other planning applications and we have determined 719 within the required timeframe. This equates to 82%.
- 4.8 The Government also uses appeal statistics as a 'quality' measure of performance in determining planning applications. However, I am not aware of a local planning authority being 'designated' in this regard. It is the speed measure that historically has received the most attention. Government similarly uses a 2 year time period and expects that in that time local planning authorities will not have had more than 20% of its decisions on major applications overturned at appeal. I am not aware of any of our major application decisions being overturned at appeal during the last 2 years. It is helpful to consider how we have performed in the Minor and Householder/Other categories in respect of appeal outcomes. For the period 01 April 2015 – 31 March 2017 we had 6 Minor application decisions overturned on appeal compared with a total number of minor applications determined of 683. This equates to only 1%. With regard to Householder/Others decision overturned at appeal during this timeframe we have had 3 of our decisions overturned, compared with a total of 891 householder/other applications determined. This equates to only 0.3%.
- 4.9 The Planning Committee Action Plan includes other measures that play an important role in determining the quality of the service that we provide. Throughout 2016/17 we have continued to hold Development Team Meetings

(DTMs) – where local members are invited to hear potential applicants present their ideas/proposals at pre-application stage. Training is an important part of the service. During 2016/17 Members will recall 4 specific training sessions that covered – Registering a planning application, Section 106s, material planning considerations (including the development plan for South Staffordshire) and highways (Manual for Streets). Members may also recall a Planning Masterclass that was held for parish councils (which covered aspects of development management and local planning). Unfortunately, we did not hold an Agents Forum during 2016/17 and will seek to address this during 2017/18.

- 4.10 The Planning Committee’s Action Plan 2016/17 appears to capture, adequately, the performance measures that the Government uses to judge the performance of local planning authorities when determining planning applications. Locally, Members have recognised the importance of training (for Members and Officers), engagement with parish councils and agents who submit planning applications regularly (Agents Forum). In addition Members have supported Development Team Meetings (DTMs). Accordingly, Members are now invited to agree to the same actions being included within a 2017/18 Action Plan for Planning Committee.

5. IMPACT ASSESSMENT – ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- 5.1 No impact assessment required.

6. PREVIOUS MINUTES

- 6.1 No previous minutes.

7. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 7.1 Appendix A: Planning Committee Action Plan 2016/17 - Quarter 4 Performance

Report prepared by:

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