

SELECT COMMITTEE

20th March 2019

Present –The Chairman (Councillor Staveley) and Councillors Brown, Mercer, Shuttleworth and Whitaker.

Officers – Strategic Manager for Planning and Regeneration, Planning Manager and Committee Officer.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Moorby, Pighills, Solloway, Sutcliffe and Thompson.

Start: 6.30pm

Finish: 8.10pm

The minutes of the Committee's meeting held on 16th January 2019 were confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

Minutes for Report

OS.421

DEVELOPMENT CONTROL - PERFORMANCE

The Chairman welcomed the Planning and Regeneration Manager and Planning Manager who had been invited to the meeting to discuss with, and assist the Committee in carrying out a review of the position in respect of Development Control performance and action taken / being taken in response to concerns raised with the Council by the Director of Planning at the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.

On 4th February 2019 the Director of Planning at the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government had written to the Chief Executive warning that as a result of its performance in determining non-major applications in the previous two years the Council may be liable for designation under Section 62A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. If the Council was designated, planning applicants would have the option of submitting direct to the Planning Inspectorate for determination. The Council had been invited to respond by no later than 20th February 2019 with details of exceptional circumstances which had affected performance, and which would make designation unreasonable. The Chief Executive had responded to the Ministry on 19th February 2019 and its response was awaited.

The Strategic Manager and Planning Manager explained and responded to questions as follows :-

- In 2018 the Service` experienced a number of exceptional circumstances that caused its performance on non-major planning applications to fall, namely, loss of three senior and experienced staff including the Development Control Manager from a team of seven officers, and sickness absence. The position had been compounded by difficulty in recruiting and also problems encountered with the installation of a new computer system in mid 2017 which had prevented production of monitoring data until March 2018.
- There was a clear correlation between the fall in performance in 2017, with the loss of experienced staff, and the simultaneous increase in burden from the introduction of a new system that proved to have a number of gremlins and in terms of monitoring performance.
- Once monitoring data became available and the position on performance made clear, a service improvement plan had been put in place. One of the more significant elements of that plan had been to seek a review of the scheme of delegation. A revised scheme had been adopted in December 2018.

- The impact of the revised scheme of delegation, combined with a full complement of staff for the first time in 2 years, had been dramatic with current performance figures showing 100% of major applications determined within time, 86% of minor applications determined within time and 97% of other applications dealt with within the required time period, compared to targets of 60%, 65% and 80% respectively.
- It would take some time for performance to reach the required level when measured over a two year period, as this would include 2018, the Inspectorate would, however, recognise this fact and the Council's upward trend. The Government's next monitoring data would cover the two year period ending September 2019.
- A revised team structure comprised of two teams (North Craven and South Craven with Skipton applications split between the two) each micro managed by the two principal Planning Officers had been put in place.
- Government grant funding had been used to engage the Planning Advisory Service in November / December 2018 to advise the Development Control Service on means of improving performance and the level of service it was providing bearing in mind the level of resources available. The Service had continued to engage with PAS, it would be helpful to maintain that relationship for the time being.
- If the Minister designated the Service, income could be lost to the Planning Inspectorate which would take the fee payable in those cases where an applicant chose to submit their application to the Inspectorate. It was however quite likely that applicants would continue to come to the Council given the uplift in performance and the time it would take the Inspectorate to determine applications. The Planning Advisory Service had indicated that applicants rarely opted to go to the Inspectorate.
- Commitment to education helped with staff retention and for the immediate future stability in the team could be expected, but ultimately it was not possible to predict how long an officer would remain with the Authority.
- Recruitment had for some time been problematic, loss of one officer per annum could be managed but more than that presented a problem.
- Seven agency staff had been used over the last 18 month period but recruiting agency personnel could also be problematic as for a number of reasons they did not always complete the contracted period (agencies required one week contract break periods) and were often drawn in the first instance to larger authorities with larger budgets.
- A future challenge for the service could be the Government's housing delivery test under which the Government assessed whether councils and other planning authorities were overseeing development of enough homes for their area ie hitting targets for the build out of sites.

There being no further questions, it was

Resolved – (1) That a working group is established to carry out a more in depth look at the performance of the Development Control Service, all Members of the Committee, with the exception of Councillors Sutcliffe and Thompson who as Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Planning Committee may be asked to attend as, to serve on the working group unless they indicate otherwise.

(2) That the Working Group's first meeting is held at 6.30pm on Wednesday 3rd April 2019 at 6.30pm.

(3) That in addition to the following, Committee Members forward to the Chairman and Committee Officer, details of any information they would wish to receive, if it can be made available, which they would find useful in taking forward the review:-

- a. Monthly breakdown on the number of applications received in the last two year period with, if possible, the monetary value.
- b. Data on appeals – decisions upheld / lost.
- c. Figures, if possible, showing the length of each agency worker's actual period with the authority in the last 18 month period.
- d. Detail of complaints logged in the last two year period.

Chairman.