

APPENDIX 1

DEVELOPMENT CONTROL REVIEW GROUP

FINAL REPORT

Introduction

1. This is the final report of the Development Control Review Group, established by the Economy and Environment Scrutiny Committee following concerns regarding the Performance on BVP109 which related to the speed of processing planning applications received by this Council.

Background Information

2. At the meeting of the Environment Scrutiny Committee held on 10th January, 2008, it was agreed that a Review Group be established following concerns relating to BVPI109.
3. The Council's performance is partly measured through a series of Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPI's) across a range of council functions and services, one of which, the speed of decision making on processing planning applications (BVPI's 109a, b and c), was not being achieved.
4. BVPI 109 was split into three with Government targets for each with this Council under performing in relation to all three. A quick review was to be undertaken with an experienced Interim Manager, Joan Rees, followed by a more specialist/extensive review by planning consultants, Trevor Roberts Associates. As the results were important for the Council's CPA Scores it was considered a review to determine how results can be improved would be beneficial.
5. A wide number of issues have been considered and discussed at several meetings. This report describes the outcome of the Review Group, it summarises the work undertaken, the findings from the processes and the subsequent recommendations. A number of longer-term options for the Council to consider are contained in the findings by Joan Rees and the Trevor Roberts Associates recommendations for continuous improvement in the quality of the service delivery to the public.

Terms of Reference

6. The following terms of reference had been established for the Review Group :-
 - a. To examine ways of increasing the speed of the decision making process on processing planning applications (BPA's 109 (a) (b) and (c)).
 - b. To consider the problems that exist and investigate possible solutions.
 - c. To monitor any recommendations arising from this Review.

Membership of the Review Group

7. The membership of the Development Control Review Group comprised all Members of the Economy and Environment Scrutiny Committee.

Acknowledgements

8. The Review Group acknowledges the support and assistance provided in the course of their investigations and would like to place on record their thanks to the following :-

Joan Rees, Interim Manager.

Steve Petch, Planning and Economic Strategy Manager (formerly Planning Services Manager).

Roy Merrett, Development Manager.

Karen Graves, Democratic Support Officer, Corporate Services Department.

Aim

9. The overall aim of the Review Group was to consider what action could be taken to improve the speed of the decision making process on processing planning applications within the constraints of the current budget.

Methods of Investigation

10. The Review Group have met formally four times between 7th February, 2008 and 5th February, 2009 (with a period of suspension) and a detailed record of the topics discussed at those meetings are contained in the notes produced following each meeting.

Financial Implications

11. The recommendations contain a number of recommendations that have a financial consequence. The Review Group recognises that the Council currently has limited resources and these spending aspirations will need to be viewed within the overall competing priorities and service delivery pressures throughout the Council.

Conclusions

12. The Group concluded that :-
 - (a). The Review Group acknowledges that within Development Control there are varying categories of difficulties encountered with providing the planning service.
 - (b). The Review Group recognizes that there are currently budget constraints on the whole of the Council that could impact on some of its findings.
 - (c). The Review Group feel it is imperative that Members are given adequate training on planning matters in order to make well judged decision at Planning Committee.

- (d). The Review Group considers that many of the recommendations arising out of both the Joan Rees Review of BVPI 109(a), (b) and (c) and the Trevor Roberts Associates consultation have already been undertaken by Development Control as best practice.
- (e). The Review Group considers that it has made an effective contribution to examining issues and problems surrounding the speed at which decisions are made on processing planning applications.

Recommendations

13. It is recommended that :-

- (a) That the Environment Scrutiny Committee endorse the findings and recommendations of the Development Control Review Group.
- (b) That the introduction of an electronic document management system (EDMS) is welcomed and Economy and Environment Scrutiny Committee await its implementation at the earliest opportunity.
- (c) That further delegation powers for Officers be considered.
- (d) That mandatory training be given to all Members of the Planning Applications Committee at the start of the Municipal Year and Members remain exempt from the Committee until such training is completed.
- (e) If Members are unable to attend any scheduled Training Sessions arrangements are to be made for one-to-one training to be given as a priority.
- (f) 'Refresher' training sessions be given to all Members of Planning Applications Committee every six months.
- (g) That 'ad hoc' training on specialist subjects e.g. wind farms, listed buildings be provided where appropriate.
- (h) That, although the approach to train Customer Services staff to assist in general planning enquiries be welcomed, further methods of improving access for the public to planning be explored.
- (i) That Economy and Environment Scrutiny Committee continue to monitor the implementation of recommendations arising out of the Trevor Roberts Associates review.

Development Control Review Group