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**DEVELOPMENT CONTROL REVIEW GROUP**

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**Responsible Cabinet Member – Councillor John Williams, Leader of the Council and  
Economy Portfolio**

**Responsible Director – Richard Alty, Assistant Chief Executive (Regeneration)**

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**SUMMARY REPORT**

**Purpose of the Report**

1. To report the findings and recommendations of the Economy and Environment Scrutiny Committee's Development Control Review Group.

**Recommendation**

2. Cabinet be requested to:-

- (a) Endorse the following recommendations of the Economy and Environment Scrutiny Committee :-
  - (i) 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.
  - (ii) That further delegation powers for Officers be considered.
  - (iii) 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;
  - (iv) 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;
  - (v) 'Refresher' training sessions be given to all Members of Planning Applications Committee every six months;
  - (vi) That 'ad hoc' training on specialist subjects e.g. wind farms, listed buildings be provided where appropriate;
  - (vii) 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;

(viii) That Economy and Environment Scrutiny Committee continue to monitor the implementation of recommendations arising out of the Trevor Roberts Associates review.

(b) Note the comments of the Assistant Chief Executive (Regeneration).

### Reasons

3. The recommendations are supported to enable improvement of the performance of the Planning Service.

**Richard Alty**  
Assistant Chief Executive - Regeneration

**Paul Wildsmith**  
Director of Corporate Services

### Background Papers

- (i) Notes of meetings of the Development Control Review Group
- (ii) Findings of Trevor Roberts Consultants
- (iii) Findings of Interim Review by Joan Rees

Karen Graves : Extension 2291

S17 Crime and Disorder	It is not considered that the content of this report has any effect in the context of the requirements placed on the Council in relation to Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act.
Health and Well Being	There are no direct implications.
Sustainability	There are no direct implications.
Diversity	There are no direct implications.
Wards Affected	All wards are affected equally.
Groups Affected	All Groups are affected equally.
Budget and Policy Framework	This report does not recommend a change to the Council's Budget or policy framework.
Key Decision	The content of this report is not a key decision.
Urgent Decision	For the purpose of the 'call-in' procedure this does not represent an urgent matter.
One Darlington: Perfectly Placed	This report has no particular impact on the sustainable Community Strategy.
Efficiency	Various proposals in the Trevor Roberts Associates and Joan Rees work aim to improve the efficiency of the service, notably the introduction of electronic document management.

## MAIN REPORT

### Information and Analysis

4. The Planning Function Task and Finish Review Group was established following concerns regarding the Performance on BVP109 which relates to the speed of processing planning applications received by this Council. The Group met on two occasions and were advised of the work being undertaken by both Joan Rees, Interim Manager to investigate factors that were impeding performance on BVP109 and Trevor Roberts, Consultants, who had been appointed to assess community consultation, investigate current consultation methods and suggest innovative approaches to the service.
5. It became apparent to the Group that until the work of Joan Rees and Trevor Roberts Associates, Consultants was completed there was little need for the Review Group to continue. Members therefore agreed to report their findings to Cabinet and to suspend the Group until such time as Trevor Roberts Associates had completed their work.
6. Trevor Roberts Associates published its findings in August and the re-named Development Control Review Group reconvened to give consideration to those findings.
7. The Development Control Review Group met on several occasions and the Final Report of the Group is attached (**Appendix 1**).
8. The Economy and Environment Scrutiny Committee agreed to accept and endorse the Review Group's recommendations and to forward the following to Cabinet for consideration :-
  - (a) 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.
  - (b) That further delegation powers for Officers be considered.
  - (c) 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;
  - (d) 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;
  - (e) 'Refresher' training sessions be given to all Members of Planning Applications Committee every six months;
  - (f) That 'ad hoc' training on specialist subjects e.g. wind farms, listed buildings be provided where appropriate;
  - (g) 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;

- (h) That Economy and Environment Scrutiny Committee continue to monitor the implementation of recommendations arising out of the Trevor Roberts Associates review.

### **Assistant Chief Executive's Comments**

- 9. All of the recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee are self-explanatory and can be carried forward. In terms of time scales, with respect to EDMS it is hoped that a system can be implemented within the 2009 calendar year. The procurement process for EDMS was approved at the 31 March 2009 meeting of Cabinet. A report on the levels of delegation to officers will be produced and brought forward for Members' consideration. A training session on listed building law and policy is to be provided to Members by officers on 14 April 2009, and regular training for Planning Applications Committee Members is being provided. Training can be provided before the first Planning Applications Committee meeting of each Municipal Year

### **Outcome of Consultation**

- 10. There has been no consultation with the public on the contents of this report. Officers and consultants involved in the Review co-operated fully at all times.