

Progress on Implementation of Scrutiny Review of the Planning Service

This appendix is based both around the agreed Action Plan set out against the Review Recommendations, and as embedded into the combined Business Improvement Plan for the service (and which incorporated key findings from the parallel Audit Commission report).

Where appropriate references are made back to the original recommendations from the Environmental Scrutiny Committee report (in brackets).

Extending Capacity to Manage Growth

Much work has been undertaken on these matters. Capacity has been transferred from the Development Management team to the Planning Policy team and this has assisted in the production of the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (completed) the UDP Saved Policies (completed and now approved) and the ongoing work on the Design Guide (Recommendation 4A). This has been pursued within the context of the wider Planning Services masterplan (Recommendation 4C). Detailed work has been carried out both to prepare a comprehensive consultation plan for the LDF (Recommendation 4F), and particular attention has been given to events in Hereford and engagement with elected members in the City (Recommendation 4B). By the time the Committee meets the consultation progress will have been completed, and an update on the numbers of people engaged will be provided at the meeting. The LDF Task Group's membership has also been expanded (Recommendation 5A).

Engagement

Much work has been carried out on the issues of extending engagement with key groups and organisations with an interest in the County's planning system (Section 5 of the ESC Review). In particular detailed discussions have been held with town and parish councils on engagement in the LDF and the role of parish planning in the new planning process (Recommendation 5E). This has proved to be beneficial, and has generated a high number of requests for tailored meetings/presentations during the recent LDF consultation process.

The Agents Forum has been placed on a formal basis (Recommendation 9A), New arrangements are now in place as agreed with the agents concerned. Formal Terms of Reference will be agreed with the Forum at the meeting arranged for 19 April 2010.

The agents do not want to submit an annual report to this Committee (Recommendation 9E).

Greater attention has been given to the use of plainer English in planning documents. The intention of arranging Plain English Campaign training for key staff has not been pursued for financial reasons. However, detailed advice has been taken from the Council's Communication Team on the preparation of publicity material for the LDF consultation (Recommendation 5C).

Infrastructure Development and Implementation

The principle of establishing a county-wide infrastructure group was accepted in principle at the LDF Task Group in September 2009 (Recommendation 6A). The matter is now being progressed through the LDF infrastructure development plan. The wider matter is now being incorporated into restructuring proposals both for the Directorate and the Service as part of our delivery mechanism for major projects.

Section 106 Procedures

The Scrutiny Review's recommendation (Recommendation 10A – 10E) have been incorporated into day to day practices. The systems are now fully operational and have brought about significant improvements in both processes, consistency, and the collection of monies where developer payments remained outstanding. The system has been both designed around the Civica system (see below) and has contributed towards the ongoing development of the Civica system. An audit of improvements will be carried out by Internal Audit this month.

Roll-out of the Civica System

The system became operational in September 2009. After some initial technical problems the system is now fully embedded within the Service. The detailed recommendation made by the Committee (Recommendation 11A – 11H) have been included in the implementation.

Phase 2 of the project has now commenced. In the planning arena this will include upgrades to the Planning and Building Control connection to the Planning Portal and the long-awaited document scanning exercise.

The Constitution and the Single Planning Committee

The new constitution and planning committee arrangements have been operational since 1 January 2010. The committee made detailed recommendations at Recommendation 11A – 11H on these matters. At a technical level the arrangements are working well, and most of the key constitutional arrangements (e.g. redirection and further information reports) have now been tested. Monitoring reports will be produced at the end of March and June 2010.

Enforcement

The Committee recommended that the enforcement service should become more viable and proactive (Recommendation 10K). Clearly different people will have differing views about the effectiveness or otherwise of an enforcement service. Nonetheless there has been an increasing direction to take positive and speedy enforcement action where necessary. The current reconfiguration of the service proposes amendments to the management of the team to provide greater supervision of the roles and consistency of approach throughout the County.