TITLE OF REVIEW:	Development Management (Planning)

SCOPING

Reason for enquiry

The Development Management (Planning) and Built & Natural Environment Teams were restructured in 2013 to reflect the economic situation and income projections at that time. With economic recovery, the number of planning applications has increased significantly with consequential impacts on the length of time to validate, register and determine applications.

In view of the potential impacts on stakeholder perceptions, this task and finish group will consider whether the current system is fit for purpose to ensure that public confidence is maintained and enhanced.

This document outlines the scope, areas, approach and people involved in the task and finish group.

Links to strategy

The review contributes to the following objectives contained in the Council's key plans or strategies:

Corporate Plan 2013/15:

"To create and maintain a successful economy by supporting:

- *Economic growth and connectivity and*

- *The improvement in quality of our natural and built environment"*

Summary of review and terms of reference

Objectives

- To review the Development Management (Planning) system.

- To consider the relationship with the natural environment function (Conservation and Landscape) and other teams and consultees that feed into the planning application process.

- To engage with key stakeholders to gain an understanding of their experiences and perceptions.

Actions

- To examine the current system, performance and mitigations put in place.

- To identify any concerns with the current system.

- To identify best practice from other local authorities.

What will NOT be included

- The operation of the Constitution in relation to planning matters; this was subject to a previous review, the Executive response was received by the General Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 11 February 2013 (http://go.m-gov.eu/064M4645)

- The outcomes of specific planning applications.

Potential outcomes

- To recommend to the Executive any changes necessary or areas for development to improve services to the public.

Key questions

- What is current practice for the processing of planning applications?

- Are planning and enforcement functions operating effectively and efficiently?

- What are the current structures and are there any plans for further changes?

- What is the status of relationships with other teams and consultees that feed into the planning application process?

- Are there examples of best practice elsewhere in the UK?

- Is 'full cost recovery' working to the advantage of the service?

- Are resources being supplemented fast enough to meet demand?

- Is delivery vulnerable to annual leave and sickness? What are the mitigations?

- Do officers have the skills and qualifications needed to cover the full range of expertise required within the service?

- Does the use of external consultants provide value for money and are there consequential impacts on the time taken to process applications?

- What training and support is in place to enable certain officers to multi-task? How well are multi-task arrangements working?

- Is the casework ratio for officers at a manageable level?

- Is the working environment for officers of a sufficient standard compared with other offices?

- Does the authority have sufficient resources to deal with enforcement and appeals?

- What are the public's perceptions of their interactions with the different functions?

- What are the arrangements for 'front-facing' customer service?

- Is the service easily accessible through the Council's website and other digital channels? What 'self-service' elements are available?

- What are the views of key stakeholders, including applicants, agents and parish councils?

- What information is provided or available to applicants and interested parties about the planning process?

- Can more information be provided through the council's website, particularly about the current status of planning applications?

- What is the current position with countywide policies and guidance (e.g. polytunnels, solar panels, broilers, use of agricultural buildings, and nutrient management)?

- What mitigations are in place for pending or anticipated future changes to government policy?

Cabinet Member(s)

Councillor PD Price (Cabinet Member, Infrastructure)

Key stakeholders/consultees

- Council officers.
- Service users, including applicants and agents.
- Parish councils.
- Other local authorities.

Potential witnesses

- Herefordshire Council Development Management (Planning) Team, including management representatives and officers directly delivering functions to the public.
- The other key stakeholders identified above.
- Chairman of the Planning Committee.

Research required

- Statistics and other information relating to compliments and complaints about the service.
- Comparative data and best practice examples from across other local authorities.

Potential visits

- To view the operation of individual teams within the service.
- Other local authorities.