

DELEGATED

AGENDA No.

**REPORT TO PLANNING
COMMITTEE**

DATE 8th AUGUST 2007

**REPORT OF HEAD OF
PLANNING**

PLANNING PERFORMANCE

Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to update members on the current performance of the planning department for the first quarter of 2007/2008. An update on the current staffing situation as well as the amount of Planning Delivery Grant (PDG) recently awarded to the authority for 2007/08 will also be discussed.

Recommendation

That planning committee note this quarterly performance report.

Background

1. In terms of the processing of applications, the government established new national targets, broken down by categories of development, known as BVPI standards. It was required that all LPA reached these standards by March 2007, which Stockton Planning Services achieved. Members will be aware that this refers particularly to BVPI 109 a, b and c, where 60% of all major applications must be determined within 13 weeks (109a), 65% of minor within 8 weeks (109b) and 80% of others within 8 weeks (109c).
2. The reporting timeframes for the BVPI targets runs from 1st April-31st March. This report presents the performance of the first quarter in that period, 1st April-30th June 2007.

Current position

3. The BVPI 109 indicator is reported on the annual year-end results, and the first quarter of that period has now passed. Performance results achieved for that period are 100% for major applications, 86.73% for minor and 80.85% for others, achieving above performance in all categories. Table 1 highlights the performance over the first quarter.

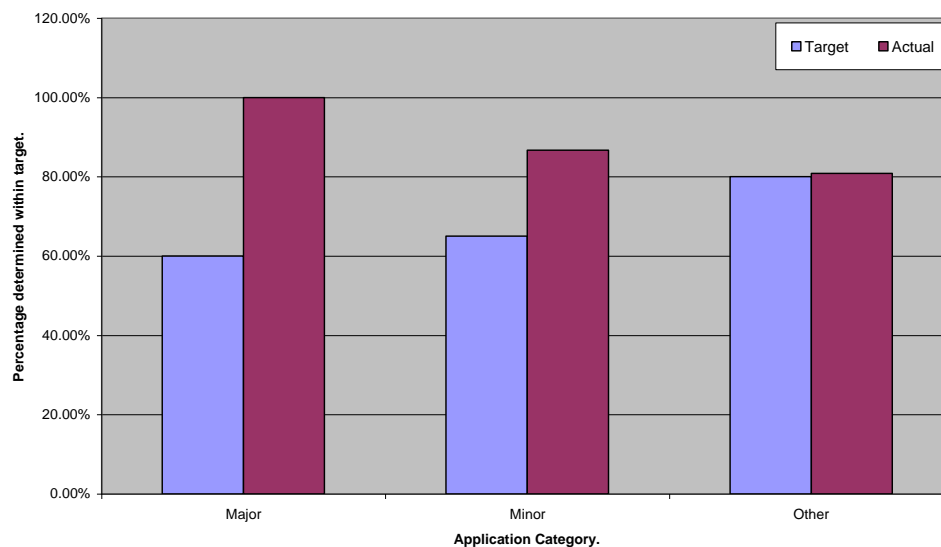
2007/2008

	Q1 April/June Determined in period		
major	18	18	100.00%
minor	98	85	86.73%
other	402	325	80.85%

Table 1 Quarter 1 performance results

- Performance of major applications since the last quarter has risen from 76.92% to 100%, with all 18 major applications determined within the 13 week time period. This is an outstanding achievement. There are now only 2 major applications that have expired still in the system, both of which have already been to committee and approved (Durham Tees Valley Airport and the Wynyard Golf Club Hotel).
- Whilst performance in BVPI 109 c (other) applications is above the required performance level of 80%, with 81% of the applications being determined within 8 weeks, it has dropped by 9% from the previous quarter's level of 90%. This is due to the fact that the section has lost 2 members of staff, and during that period, one of the Area Team Leaders was absent for a significant period. In addition, it has proved difficult to recruit to the vacant Area Team Leader post (4 attempts in 18 months) and this has led to increased workloads and pressures for remaining staff that proved difficult to manage in the short term. This situation has been rectified, as discussed elsewhere in the report. The following graph highlights performance against national targets.

Planning performance figures



6. The steady increase in performance over the last 18 months has been reflected in the level of PDG allocation announced this month. The grant was announced in 2 stages, Stockton being allocated £55,142 in the first round, based entirely on development control performance for the year ending June 2006. The second tranche of grants announced this week related to development control performance from 1st July 2006 to 31st March 2007 with a proposed bonus of £50,000 for authorities who have met all 3 BVPI targets. In addition, the second part of the grant also covers progress on plan-making (LDF) and sustainable development, e-planning and housing in high demand areas.
7. Therefore it gives me great pleasure in announcing that Stockton received £264,915 in total, the highest grant awarded to an authority in the north of England. The grant was made up of £156,902 for DS performance, with an additional £50,000 bonus for achieving all 3 BVPI targets, £60,370 for Spatial Planning, and £28,317 for e-planning. Middlesbrough were awarded £187,631, Darlington £93,951, Hartlepool £190,990, Redcar and Cleveland £155,176, and Newcastle £248,192.
8. The grant aims to provide additional funding to enable local authorities to improve their planning resources and introduce the many changes that the government is bringing in as part of its programme to reform planning. To encourage reinvestment, 25% of any PDG allocation must be spent on capital expenditure, which is likely to involve the replacement of the servers to continue the provision of a seamless end to end planning system, and to scan the outstanding planning applications into CAPS to make the information available online, doing away with the need for the historical paper files.
9. From a staffing perspective, there have been no new professional members of staff appointed in the quarter, although there have been 4 appointments made this month, 1 in Development Services and 3 in Spatial Planning. However to tackle the problem of recruiting a new Area Team Leader, the section has been restructured to create a Majors Team, to be led by Greg Archer, the Major Projects Officer. The vacant Area Team Leader post has now been upgraded and instead 2 senior officers will be appointed to work in the new team. As the Majors team will be able to take on an increased number of larger applications, this will allow the other Area Team Leaders to devote more time to management and performance issues within the 2 area teams. The turnover of staff has undoubtedly effected performance levels, but measures have been put in place to ensure that the long term performance of the service continues to improve and provides the first class quality service that the citizens of Stockton expect from a 4* rated authority.

Recommendations

That planning committee note this quarterly performance report and acknowledge the hard work and dedication of Planning Staff and colleagues within other service areas to continuously improve performance and the reputation of the Council.

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Financial Implications; PDG based on performance targets reached

Environmental Implications; None directly.

Community Safety Implications; None directly.