

## THE EXECUTIVE

18 NOVEMBER 2003

### REPORT FROM THE DIRECTOR OF LEISURE AND ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

<b>DEVELOPMENT CONTROL PERFORMANCE INDICATORS AND ACTION PLAN</b>	<b>FOR DECISION</b>
<i>To report to the Executive on the Performance Indicators and Targets for Development Control and Town Planning Applications and set out proposals to achieve an improvement in national targets.</i>	
<b><u>Summary</u></b>	
<p>The performance indicators for the Development Control Section are based on the time taken to deal with various types of Town Planning Applications. These are split into three groups namely Major, Minor and Others. Each group is set a national target for making the decision. Major applications have a target of 60% within 13 weeks, 65% of applications in 8 weeks for Minor and 80% in 8 weeks for Other. Last years figures showed a marked down turn in performance mainly within the last quarter and it is this, which needs to be addressed.</p>	
<p>To improve the situation an action plan has been devised and a number of action points from this have been implemented and have already had a significant effect. Figures to 1 September 2003 show a 35% increase in the number of Minor applications determined within time, and the overall quarter statistic has increased to 58.7%. This is only 7% below the Government's target. A 15.6% rise in Other applications has also been attained, which resulted in a 75.6% achievement rate; less than 5% off the Government's target. Assuming staff can be recruited and retained there should be continued improvement in our achievement rate. However, until the underlying problems relating to Major applications are addressed this figure will continue to be subject to major fluctuation.</p>	
<b><u>Recommendations</u></b>	
<p>The Executive is recommended to endorse the Action Plan below and note that the first seven points have already been implemented.</p>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Changes to the application booking system in line with advice from the Audit Commission.</li><li>2. Greater use of Technical Clerks in logging applications and dealing with enquiries to free up Planning Officer time.</li><li>3. Bi-weekly report to remind all officers of applications which are coming up to their expiry date in order that these can be fast tracked. This is also a monitoring tool for the Development Control Manager and the Department Management Board.</li><li>4. Greater stress to Officers on importance of time limits through team meetings.</li><li>5. Action will be taken on every working day on Applications for which Delegated Authority already exists.</li></ol>	

6. Development Control Boards to be held every two weeks.
7. Increase in Officers powers to make a decision on Town Planning applications (now contained in the Council's Scheme of Delegation.)
8. Section 106 Agreements - Policy in Local Development Framework:  
Officers will draw up a policy which contains criteria that clearly sets out what contributions will be required for certain applications by area. This will enable faster delivery of applications, as developers will be aware of their obligations prior to submission of an application
9. Seek ISO 9000 Accreditation (by April 2004) to support delivery service.
10. Increase in staff in post to process applications

**Reason**

To assist the Council in achieving its Community Priorities of '*Making Barking and Dagenham Cleaner, Greener and Safer, Regenerating the Local Economy*'

**Ward Affected** - All Wards

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**1. Background**

- 1.1 The key issues in the performance of the Development Control Section have been staffing and resources, with a number of experienced officers leaving to more highly paid employment. Difficulties in recruitment have been experienced, due mainly to the lack of qualified planners within London. This has led to a reliance on agency staff, most of whom are mostly successful. It has become self evident from the amount of Officer time involved, that the agency staff take a considerable bedding in period. This is a situation that is reflected across London and the South East, mostly due to high living costs. This is coupled with a marked increase in the number of applications submitted with rises of 20% per year experienced over several years. As a result the Council has fewer staff dealing with more applications, which leads to delays. A recent Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) statement said that Town Planning Officers dealing with mid-range applications should have a case load of no more than 150 applications a year. Staff in this Council are dealing with nearly twice that amount.
- 1.2 This problem has been recognised by the recent reorganisation, which increased staff numbers in Development Control. Also the recent recruitment of two Town Planning Officers, who are now bedded-in and the release of an agency planner have led to an up turn in the figures for this quarter. Two Technical Clerks have also been employed within the Administration Section and these clerks are

beginning to provide valuable officer support and will continue to do so as their roles increase. This increase has been helped by the increased delegated powers to Officers in the Council's Scheme of Delegation (DLES). At the time of writing this report (this quarter has a few days to run) figures indicate it is likely that an 82% rate of decisions will be dealt with under delegated authority

- 1.3 Other factors are outside the Council's control, namely the delay in the Planning White Paper, which was to set up the mechanisms for achieving these figures and the delays to the system due to Section 106 Agreements. A meeting was held with representatives from the ODPM last week. At this meeting it was highlighted that as a majority of applications contain Section 106 Agreement it was physically impossible to deal with them within the timescale. Some applications that come under the categories of Minor and Other will also have agreements that cause delays. A suggestion was to take the date of the Council's decision as the Date of Decision rather than the Date of Issue. Some council's are adopting an approach of putting planning conditions relating to Section 106 Agreements on the Decision Notice and issuing it. This will enable faster delivery of applications, as developers will be aware of their obligations prior to submission of an application. However, the legality of these conditions is still under review as they may turn out to be difficult to enforce.
- 1.4 One point should be made in respect of Major applications. The percentage of these targets that meet the target time will tend to vary considerably due to the smaller number. In the last quarter the Council dealt with 6 out of 11 applications within 13 weeks which is 54%. This quarter only 4 out of 11 have been dealt within 13 weeks, which is 36.4%. As a result each application has a disproportionate effect of approximately 10% on the quarter figures.
- 1.5 However, as a result of the figures indicated in the above paragraph, improvements to the service have been implemented.

## **2. Action Points**

- 2.1 To achieve an improvement in performance a number of action points were devised. These were:
  1. Changes to the application booking system in line with advice from the Audit Commission.
  2. Greater use of Technical Clerks in logging applications and dealing with enquiries to free up officer time.
  3. Bi-weekly report to remind all officers of application which are coming up to their expiry date in order that these can be fast tracked. This is also a monitoring tool for the Development Control Manager.
  4. Greater stress to Officers on importance of time limits through team meetings.
  5. Action will be taken every working day on Applications for which Delegated Authority, which now exists under the Council's Scheme of Delegation (DLES).

6. Development Control Boards to be held every two weeks.
7. Increase in Officers' powers to make a decision on Town Planning Applications (now contained in the Council's Scheme of Delegation, (DLES)).
8. Section 106 Agreements - Policy in Local Development Framework:  
Officers will draw up a policy which contains criteria that clearly sets out what contributions will be required for certain applications by area. This will enable faster delivery of applications, as developers will be aware of their obligations prior to submission of an application
9. Seek ISO 9000 Accreditation (by April 2004) for the future purpose of supporting delivery service. This is already a target under the Balanced Score Card for this service.
10. Increase in staff in post to process applications

### **3. Project Timetable**

- 3.1 The first seven points listed in paragraph 2 above have already been implemented with good results. In respect of the three action points still to be implemented, the Local Development Framework is a priority and is expected to be ready by December 2003. The ISO Accreditation is programmed has already started and is in to the Council's Balanced Scorecard for achievement by April 2004. The increase in staffing is part of the major reorganisation of the Planning Section and it is expected that adverts for the new posts will be sent out in January 2004.

### **4. Financial Implications**

- 4.1 The Executive will recall that it received a report on the 9 September 2003 on the Restructuring of Regeneration and the funding for the above proposals and staffing implications was agreed as part of that report.

### **4. Consultations**

- 4.1 The following people have seen this report and are happy with it as it stands.

Chris Sale Senior Information Officer, Corporate Strategy  
Peter Wright Head of Planning  
Bob Cooper, Interim Head of Finance, LESD

### **Background Papers**

- Executive Minute 111; 9 September 2003 re: Restructuring Regeneration - Preparing for the Future
- The Governments Performance Indicators for Development Control. [www.odpm.gov.uk](http://www.odpm.gov.uk)
- Planning: Delivering a Fundamental Change [www.odpm.gov.uk](http://www.odpm.gov.uk)