

To: City Executive Board

Date: 8 December 2010

Item No: 21

Report of: Head of City Development

Title of Report: Planning Enforcement Action Plan

Summary and Recommendations

Purpose of report: To provide a progress update on implementation of action plan

Key decision? No

Executive lead member: Colin Cook

Policy Framework: Improve services, value for money

Recommendation(s): To note the progress achieved to date and future actions.

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 CEB at its meeting of 9th June 2010, considered the Value and Performance Scrutiny Committee (VPSC) report of the Review Group on Planning Enforcement and upheld its recommendations (see extract in Appendix 1). The recommendations had been incorporated in the combined Action Plan for improvements to the service, pursuant to both the Business Process Improvement and the Scrutiny Committee reviews of enforcement (see copy of the action plan in appendix 2). CEB requested to report back on progress.
- 1.2 This progress update report has been referred for comment to the Scrutiny Committee Review Group. The progress update against the actions of the action plan is provided mainly in the attached spreadsheet as well in the more detailed comments below. Those actions yet to be completed are highlighted through shading.

2.0 The Enforcement Service

- 2.1 Following the departure of two of the three enforcement officers in March 2010, two temporary replacement officers were recruited in April

2010. Since then one has been made permanent, while the other continues on a temporary contract, providing flexibility with recruitment in the current financial climate.

- 2.2 In July two planning officers also left the Council, during a time when there was a pause in recruitment, while the necessary in-year savings were being identified and delivered. One of them has been replaced on a temporary basis since. The reduction in staff was also coupled with a 20% increase in planning application workloads. In response to this situation, management redeployed resources from various parts of the planning section, to allow the effective processing of planning applications as a priority, along with maintaining performance levels.
- 2.3 Therefore between July and October 2010 the two temporary planning enforcement officers were given a planning application workload to deal with, thus reducing the resources available for dealing with enforcement cases, as well as with service improvements. Fortunately, there has been a reduction in the number of requests for enforcement investigations. In addition the new implemented enforcement process, following the Business Process Improvement review has enable the service to become more efficient. This allowed the reduced staff resources to still maintain the number of live enforcement cases to just below 500, at roughly the same level as was achieved following the concerted effort on the case backlog carried out bet Jan and March 2010.
- 2.4 At the same time the recent October upgrade of the IT system, as well as the forthcoming additional upgrade by mid 2011, which is likely to include some improved functionality for enforcement, have also contributed to the delay of the development of the necessary IT improvements. A number of actions are in progress while the report is being prepared and it is anticipated that they will be completed in advance of the forthcoming CEB meeting.
- 2.5 We have made available helpful information for customers, while officers have improved on the communication with customers through updates on individual cases, following the implementation of the new processes. The new prioritisation framework and performance criteria have also assisted, however we have not been in a position to measure those yet and that is work in progress. It is anticipated that the first quarterly performance report will be ready for the May 2011 cycle of Area Committees.
- 2.6 As from November 2010, the planning application workload of the planning enforcement officers has been reduced/removed to enable a greater part of the resources to work on enforcement cases and on improvements to the enforcement service.

3.0 Other issues – partnership and pro-active working.

- 3.1 With regard to partnership working between enforcement and other services, we have sought to maximise that within the existing ways of working, eg. where appropriate working more closely with Building Control on building works, Environmental Protection and Licensing on Houses in Multiple Occupation and street licensing etc., as appropriate on relevant cases.
- 3.2 Furthermore the service is undertaking a small amount of pro-active work on relevant high profile cases, where members or residents have brought issues to the officers' attention.

4.0 Conclusion

- 4.1 80% of the actions will be complete by 8th December. Those actions yet to be completed are highlighted through shading in Appendix 2. In particular Officers have reduced the case backlog, implemented improved case prioritisation, processes and communication with customers and have reviewed the service structure. However, there is still work in progress in relation to the upgrade of the IT system, performance management and improved publicity material.

Appendices to report –

Appendix 1: CEB minute 9th June 2010

Appendix 2: Enforcement Action Plan; Progress 1st Nov 2010

Name and contact details of author:-

Name : Niko Grigoropoulos
Job title; Development Management Manager
Service Area: City Development
Tel: 01865 2151 e-mail: ngrigoropoulos@oxford.gov.uk

Comment [x1]: Name, telephone number and email

List of background papers: none

Version number: V3

