

APPENDIX C**Mid Kent Planning Support – Briefing Note****5 August 2014****1. Mid Kent Planning Support – Update and Position****1.1 Context**

The Mid Kent Planning Support Shared Service brings the back office administrative support for Planning departments together as a single service, based at one location (Maidstone House), with a single employer (Maidstone). The shared service also provides and discharges the land charges functions for the three authorities.

1.2 Processing Issues and Rates

The Mid Kent Planning Support Service started on 2 June 2014 with a staged launch starting the week before and a planned cut off on application processing on 19 May to clear existing work before commencement. As expected we experienced a number of general problems as a result of undergoing such a big change, but we also experienced critical technical issues that prevented the processing of applications on the new system for a number of weeks. Gradually, through bedding in the service and working with IT and our main software supplier iDox our processing rates have increased.

1.3 Processing Rate (Table 1)

Week Comm	Total Applications (MBC, SBC, TWBC)		
	Received	Acknowledged	Invalid Appns
19/05/2014	233		102
26/05/2014	179		27
02/06/2014	188		10
09/06/2014	240		39
16/06/2014	192		46
23/06/2014	164		71
30/06/2014	132		156
07/07/2014	117		184
14/07/2014	161		201
	1606	836	237

Inevitably this has led to a significant backlog of work with a backlog estimated at 533 applications (of all types including pre-applications and submissions of details) as of Friday 18 July 2014. The backlog is calculated as the amount received less the amount acknowledged and invalidated.

1.4 Customer Service and complaints

The primary focus of discussion at the last committee was on the impact on customers and the numbers of complaints received.

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Maidstone have received fewer than 5 formal complaints relating to the shared service. However, this does not reflect the volume of customer contact we have been handling as a result of the poor service our customers have received due to the processing delays. Our approach has been to help our customers that contact us and reach a resolution before the formal complaint stage as this is beneficial to both us and the customer.

The contact centre staff have suffered from the same issues as the planning support team in undergoing a significant change in taking on three planning authorities' calls. The technical issues have been resolved and the ability of customer service staff to respond to calls effectively and to the satisfaction of the customer has improved.

1.5 Actions Taken

The following proactive actions have been taken to help reduce the backlog and improve service to customers whilst it is cleared:

- Processes redesigned to enable planning officers to carry out part of the process and resources redeployed to critical 'pinch points'.
- Processes redesigned to ensure data is available to the contact centre immediately
- Additional temporary recruitment in the validation team, land charges team and scanning team
- Staff authorised to work overtime and weekends
- Purchase of new equipment brought forwards to enable faster processing

2. Proposed Internal Review

The Chief Executives of the Mid Kent authorities are considering the structure and timing of an internal review into how the delivery of the shared service was carried out with a focus on lessons learnt.

- Proposed for October 2014 (once the service is in 'steady state' and the backlog under control)
- Carried out by Internal Audit
- Scope yet to be agreed, but draft scope to be sent to Overview and Scrutiny Chairs for their involvement

Following discussion with Councillor Gooch, Chairman of Strategic Leadership and Corporate Services OSC, it was felt appropriate to wait until that review had been completed before deciding whether a full Overview and Scrutiny review was required in order to prevent a duplication of work and if necessary to provide an evidence base for the committee.