

Strategic Planning Sustainability & Transport Committee

8th November 2016

Is the final decision on the recommendations in this report to be made at this meeting?

Yes

Planning Service Review

Final Decision-Maker	Strategic Planning & Sustainability & Transport Committee
Lead Head of Service	N/A
Lead Officer and Report Author	William Cornall – Director of Regeneration & Place
Classification	Public
Wards affected	All

This report makes the following recommendations to this Committee:

1. The committee is requested to note that the review will commence in January 2017, to be completed with the recommendations implemented by 30th June 2017.

This report relates to the following corporate priorities:

- Keeping Maidstone Borough an attractive place for all – An exemplar planning service is integral to this objective, by maintaining and enhancing the built environment and public realm.
- Securing a successful economy for Maidstone Borough – An exemplar planning service will ensure developers will choose Maidstone as a location in which to invest.

Timetable

Meeting	Date
Committee – Strategic Planning Sustainability & Transport	8 th November 2016

Planning Service Review

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 A review of the Planning Service is required as a mechanism for continuous improvement for the Department, and also to ensure that the service provides ongoing value for money to the Council and the end user, as well as to ensure that customer expectations are met.

2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 2.1 A small working group of Officers from the Corporate Leadership Team, Planning and the Business Transformation teams has been formed to scope the service review. Collectively, the working group felt that there were the following **drivers for change**;

- Costs of the service exceed income.
- High volumes of appeals and associated costs.
- A possible disconnect between Development Management & Planning Policy teams.
- A need to improve customer satisfaction and to manage expectations.
- A need to improve the overall quality of new completed developments.
- The Housing & Planning Act 2016, bringing private sector competition.
- The need to fund infrastructure to support growth.
- Difficulties in recruiting and retaining Planning staff.
- A low risk appetite in terms of decision making.

- 2.2 Furthermore, the working group felt that the **desired outcomes** from the review would be as follows;

- Value for Money, narrowing the gap between income and expenditure.
- Customer satisfaction (from service users) is increased.
- Planning is fully engaged with strategic corporate objectives.
- Applications are policy compliant upon receipt.
- More applications processed with consistency and certainty via Planning Performance Agreements.
- Appeal volumes are reduced.
- Infrastructure delivery is maximised through CIL, s106 & s278.
- Strategies / SPD's are concise, easily readable documents.
- High quality design and place shaping are embedded within the service.
- Planning staff are always proactive, collaborative and commercially astute.
- Planning is a trusted service for applicants, developers elected members and the public, with easy and effective engagement between stakeholders.
- Improved resilience across the department.
- Points of current service failure are removed.
- A coherent communication strategy around growth.
- Improved usage of IT / Customer Relationship Management systems.

2.3 The working group decided that the following service areas **should be within the scope of the review;**

- Fees and other income / business management.
- Pre-application service to include fee incentives.
- Planning Performance Agreements.
- Development management to include larger applications.
- Strategic Planning.
- Planning administration / shared services support.
- Enforcement.
- Section 106 / CIL management and maximisation.
- Specialisms - Heritage, Conservation, Trees.
- Public engagement and public relations.
- Style & content of reporting.
- Exploration of outsourcing / commissioning / shared service opportunities.
- Department staffing structure, to include management.

2.4 The working group decided that the following service areas **should be outside the scope of the review;**

- Land charges
- Building control
- Emergency Planning

2.5 The working group considered that the various **stakeholders** pertinent to the review would be as follows;

- Chair and Vice Chair of Strategic Planning, Sustainability & Transport Committee.
- Chair and Vice Chair of Planning Committee.
- Members.
- Parishes.
- Department Management Team.
- CEO.
- Kent Developers Group.
- Swale Borough Council (in the context of the Planning Registration shared service).

2.6 The author has already met with the Chairs and Vice Chairs of the Strategic Planning, Sustainability & Transport Committee and the Planning Committee, all of whom welcomed the review, and have input into the scope detailed in this report.

2.7 The other stakeholders detailed will be engaged through a number of mechanisms to include workshops, surveys or interviews.

2.8 The working group agreed a clear set of deliverables that they would desire from the review. Furthermore, of these deliverables, it was all agreed which could be undertaken by the Council's own Business Transformation team, and which we would require external expertise to complete. The external work will largely be undertaken by a specialist Planning advisor, but one that has a focus upon service innovation rather than a technical planning specialist. We have agreed that the following three firms will be invited to bid for this work:

- iESE
- Association for Public Service Excellence (Apse)
- Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (Solace)

2.9 Park Sims Training, a niche communications training firm who specialise in plain English will undertake the review of the reporting formats, contents and protocols, as this is only a relatively small part of the overall assignment. They have worked successfully with other council departments previously, with excellent results.

2.10 **Therefore, the deliverables will be as per the table below:**

Deliverable	Undertaken by whom
To undertake a stakeholder audit.	Business Improvement.
To undertake an exercise of stakeholder engagement / consultation.	External
Vision statement for the Planning Service.	External
Forecasting / analysis of future department workload.	Business Improvement
High level process maps for all key service areas.	Business Improvement
Recommended staffing structure to effect changes.	External & Business Improvement
Recommended areas for commissioning/ procurement type approach.	External
Recommended commissioning protocols.	Procurement team
Recommended fee and time scales.	External & Business Improvement
Recommended reporting formats, content and protocols.	Park Sims Training

3. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

3.1 The committee is requested to note that the review will commence in January 2017, and that the procurement of the external consultant will be undertaken before then. The review will be completed with the recommendations implemented by 30th June 2017.

4. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 The only option is 3.1.

5. CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK

5.1 As discussed previously, the Chairs and Vice Chairs of the two planning committees have been consulted with, as well as the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive.

6. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

- 6.1 All Members of both planning committees will be involved in the workshop/s that will be held and the progress made with the review will be formally reported to both committees at the midpoint.

7. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Impact on Corporate Priorities	The best possible Planning service will underpin all the Corporate objectives and of course the delivery of the emerging Local Plan.	Chief Executive. Alison Broom
Risk Management	N/A	
Financial	The service review will evidence best practice in getting value for money and could identify opportunities for efficiencies within the service. It may therefore help to mitigate the factors that are currently leading to overspends within Development Management.	Section 151 Officer Mark Green
Staffing	It is important that the review is welcomed by all the Planning staff, and that it is handled sensitively, so that staff morale is maintained and that they will ultimately own and implement the deliverables.	Head of Planning. Rob Jarman
Legal	It will be important to involve the Legal team who deal with planning matters in any review of processes, such as s106 agreements, managing appeals and inquiries etc.	Interim Head of Legal Partnership
Equality Impact Needs Assessment	N/A	
Environmental/Sustainable Development	The review will build mechanisms into the planning process to embed high quality	Head of Planning. Rob Jarman

	design, both in visual terms as well as in terms of sustainability.	
Community Safety	N/A	
Human Rights Act	N/A	
Procurement	The external consultant will be procured in accordance with the Council's standing orders.	Section 151 Officer. Mark Green
Asset Management	N/A	

8. REPORT APPENDICES

The following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report:

None.

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None.