



## AUDIT COMMITTEE REPORT

<b>Report Title</b>	<b>Planning Applications</b>
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**AGENDA STATUS: PUBLIC**

<b>Audit Committee Meeting Date:</b>	22 <sup>nd</sup> October 2009
<b>Policy Document:</b>	No
<b>Directorate:</b>	Planning & Regeneration
<b>Accountable Cabinet Member:</b>	Cllr Church

### 1. Purpose

1.1 To receive a progress report on the implementation of the findings and recommendations of the Internal Audit Report 2007/08 Planning Applications Review.

### 2. Recommendations

2.1 To note the report and actions to date.

### 3. Issues and Choices

#### 3.1 Report Background

3.1.1 The Committee has requested a progress report on the outstanding actions from the 2007/08 Internal Audit Report: Planning Applications Review

#### 3.2 Issues

3.2.1 N/a

#### 3.3 Choices (Options)

3.3.1 The Planning Department has been restructured and new Management has been brought in since the audit was conducted in February 2008.

- 3.3.2 As a result new processes and operating procedures have been introduced. The Service Plan and Data Quality Action Plan have been reviewed and updated and performance significantly improved.
- 3.3.3 The most significant improvement to impact on the findings of the Internal Audit Review has been the commencement of the up-grade of the Development Control operating system Fast Planning. This commenced early in 2009 and scheduled to be completed during the 2010/11 financial year. This includes all officer training, all the necessary data capture and installation of new monitoring systems. On completion it will include appeals and enforcement and all constraints will be mapped on the GIS. This is a major project to improve service delivery and accessibility to the planning services. The project is being funded from Housing Planning Delivery Grant
- 3.3.4 The findings of the Audit Report are, therefore, being addressed as set out in the table below. This includes actions which may have been shown previously as completed actions. These are being re-addressed as part of the total system up-grade:

<b>Medium Risk Areas</b>	
No standardised training scheme for Planning Officers	In place from September 2008 reviewed and updated during 2009 Appraisals. Intensive 1:1 training in new systems being rolled out to all officers.
Procedure notes for Planning Applications process are not up to date	All procedure notes have been reviewed. The Development Control computer system is currently being updated and new procedure notes are being written for all activities. These will be completed for each activity when the updated systems are fully operational.
Timely serving of enforcement notices	Serving an enforcement notice is an action of last resort. Negotiating problems away is always preferable. Each case will be considered on its merits in discussion with the Borough Solicitor.
Complaints not being processed on a timely basis	All complaints are dealt with in accordance with the Council's complaints policy and are monitored through the CRM monthly.
The Authority is not meeting BVPI targets	Some BVPIs have been replaced with National Indicators. The targets for the Department were reviewed and updated as part of the 2009/10 Service Plan. Targets are monitored monthly as part of the Council's CPR. The Department is still not meeting the national quality of service, but this is being addressed as part of the up-grade of the Computer System. This target (100%) should be achieved by 1 <sup>st</sup> April 2010.

Risk that planning applications are not being dealt with consistently and in line with procedures	This has been addressed by appointing new management and a new Principal Planning Officer to strengthen the depth of experience of the team. NI157 is being met. The 2009 audit found that these matters had been addressed.
<b>Low Risk Areas</b>	
Planning Applications may be processed without considering all necessary aspects	A local validation list has been prepared. This will be reviewed in line with national guidelines in 2010 with publication of new regulations in April 2010.
The full benefits of not using the Comino system are not being realised	The task of back-scanning is an on-going project. All files from 2005 to date are now stored electronically. The interface between Comino and Fast Planning is being rationalised through the current up-grade of Fast Planning.
No record of pre-application advice exists	A new protocol for pre-application advice was introduced in June 2009. All pre-application advice is recorded and is stored on Fast Planning. The new protocol ensures continuity between the officer giving advice at pre-application stage and the case officer who deals with the application. Ideally and usually this is the same officer.

#### **4. Implications (including financial implications)**

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##### **4.1 Policy**

4.1.1 N/a

##### **4.2 Resources and Risk**

4.2.1 None

##### **4.3 Legal**

4.3.1 N/a

##### **4.4 Equality**

4.4.1 N/a

##### **4.5 Consultees (Internal and External)**

4.5.1 Borough Solicitor, Senior Freedom of Information Officer, GIS Team Leader, Head of ICT and Customer Services.

##### **4.6 Other Implications**

4.6.1 N/a

## **5. Background Papers**

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5.1 N/a

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