

# CORPORATE COMMITTEE

10 APRIL 2019

## REPORT OF DIRECTOR FOR GROWTH AND REGENERATION

### RESOURCES TO SUPPORT IMPLEMENTATION OF PLANNING SERVICES REVIEW

#### 1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To advise the Committee of the broad findings of the Planning Services Review and to seek to approval for the resources to support the implementation of the required changes.

#### 2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 **To Note the completion of the Planning Services Review and the summary of findings as outlined in para 3.3;**
- 2.2 **To acknowledge the proposed approach to implementing the review outlined in para 3.4 and agree the additional temporary HR and resources to re-design business processes to ensure the appropriate change is delivered;**
- 2.3 **To delegate authority to the Chief Executive to implement any required structural changes as a consequence of the review, from within the resources identified, and to deal with any consequential HR or one-off financial implications;**
- 2.4 **To acknowledge that the review identifies a number of areas where additional ongoing resources may be required but that these will only be requested once an appropriate review of process and structures has been undertaken. Confirmation of any additional resources will be the subject of further member approval in due course.**

#### 3.0 KEY ISSUES

##### 3.1 Background

The Council has a clearly articulated vision promoting growth and regeneration, with a desire to enable "...more homes to be built, attracting quality jobs and supporting strong and prosperous communities." The Council has secured the adoption of its Local Plan, and through our partnership with the County Council, government has agreed to provide significant funding in support of the Melton Mowbray Distributor Road (MMDR). Further funding is being sought through the Housing Infrastructure Fund. Over 6,000 new homes are planned for the borough by 2036, with approximately 4,000 forming part of two large sustainable neighbourhoods adjoining the town. To support delivery, the Council has invested in a dedicated regeneration team and boosted the planning team's resources following the planning fee increase in early 2018.

Within the Corporate Delivery Plan 2018-2020 the Council also made a specific commitment to undertake a review of its planning service, recognising the importance of this area in ensuring the growth required is delivered. The review

was undertaken by an independent planning expert and commenced in September 2018 and concluded in December 2018. The report compares the planning service of Melton Borough Council to relevant planning authorities and nationally recognised benchmarks, considers how the service is performing against statutory requirements, sets out the views of internal and external stakeholders, comments on good practice and makes recommendations for areas of improvement. A Draft Report was received in January 2019 and considered by officers and the findings discussed with lead members and members of the Planning Committee. Comments, where appropriate, have been incorporated into an extensive final report alongside a significant number of recommendations. Officers are now reviewing these in detail and will be developing a detailed implementation plan to secure long lasting improvements to the operation of planning services in Melton.

### **3.2 Method for undertaking the review**

The review began with a desk top assessment to establish a baseline of how the service operates. It looked at volume of work, resources, skill sets, customer perceptions, expectations and satisfaction levels, compared with councils in a similar context. A thorough assessment of previous Planning Committee agendas, reports and minutes was also undertaken over the last three years.

Over 30 interviews were undertaken as part of the review. Those who were interviewed included:

- The political and managerial leadership of the Council, including the Planning Committee Chair.
- Managers in the planning service
- Relevant internal Directors, Service Managers and Internal Audit
- Developers, Agents and Architects.
- Parish Council and Community/Local Resident representatives
- Representative of relevant neighbouring Councils and the County Council.
- Two focus groups were held with planning staff.

### **3.3 Summary of Findings**

The report sets out the key areas and recommendations that have been made and considers the current performance of the service on the basis of the following themes:

- Leadership and Corporate Engagement
- Achieving Good Outcomes
- Leading and Engaging the Community
- Customer Focus
- People, Performance and Resource Management
- Implementing the Improvements

The key findings of the review are as follows:

- The Planning Service is part of a good council that has high ambitions for supporting growth. There is a strong commitment to delivering quality services.
- The delivery of the Local Plan was an excellent achievement and this provides a sound platform for decision making on planning applications and has political ownership. Building on the Local Plan there now needs to be a focus on

producing Supplementary Planning Documents to provide the necessary detail to preserve and enhance the special characteristics of the Borough.

- Officers are generally seen as accessible, given the limited resources available, though there is a perception the service is more reactive than proactive and there is a need to move from a 'development control' approach to 'development management'.
- There is a mixed picture regarding the speed and efficiency in making planning decisions. Performance in relation to national targets on planning applications has improved and is currently good, despite the length of time statutory consultees take to respond. On the other hand, for related reasons and to accommodate negotiated solutions, the number of applications where 'extensions of time' have been requested has risen to very high levels, indicating that more needs to be done to ensure an efficient service is provided.
- The customer journey is inconsistent, there needs to be a better understanding of, and focus on, the service's customers, both internal and external and communications needs to improve.
- Elements of the development management process, particularly validation are cumbersome, involve too many hand-offs and are inefficient. These need to be addressed through a business process review. ICT does not provide the type of assistance it should and this too should be reviewed as part of this process.
- External stakeholders, particularly applicants and agents have limited confidence in the operation of the Planning Committee. In the absence of the Local Plan the level of deferrals and overturned recommendations was high. This is improving but there are still concerns that the Committee is too accommodating of objectors and that ward councillors have an over-prominent role. Speaking rights also need to be overhauled. The election of a new administration creates an opportunity to revise the procedure rules and deliver a comprehensive training programme to enable a more strategic view to be taken, given the Planning Committee's duty is to the whole community, not individual wards.
- Enforcement and monitoring of planning conditions is under developed and needs to be given greater priority and resources to build trust and confidence in the process.
- There needs to be stronger management and leadership in the planning service. Currently there is an emphasis on managing by 'doing' resulting in key organisational or service issues not being addressed. This has been exacerbated by the increase in demand and capacity issues following the departure of experienced staff, difficulties in their replacement and recruitment generally, and increasing workloads outstripping growth in resource allocation..
- An imbalanced and overly complex structure has created ambiguity of roles and responsibilities and this too needs to be addressed.
- Performance managements needs to improve, both in terms of managing processes and the performance of the planning team. Performance information is limited and not easily accessible and is not routinely utilised to refocus resources where necessary.
- There is a direct link between developing and empowering staff and retention and recruitment difficulties the team is facing. Staff in both planning and planning administration needs to be trained and developed to enable them to carry out their responsibilities more effectively in an efficient and customer focussed way.

- Given the pressures on the team the Council will need to consider whether additional resources are required to support the improvements identified. The review identifies where additional resources would be of greatest benefit in securing performance improvement.
- Any changes will need to be effectively programme managed with appropriate resources deployed to support this. This will need to include a training and development support for both the planning management and the wider team.

### 3.4 Response and Implementation

The Planning Service was the subject of an Internal Audit Review in 2015 and a Planning Advisory Review in 2016. Some of the issues identified and recommendations made have not been effectively implemented, including several which would have made the greatest impact. This has created a level of frustration within the service that the challenges are understood but have not been effectively addressed. It is vital that following this review the Council makes a commitment to effectively respond. The reports itself notes the risks associated with the multiple required changes and highlights the need for the programme to be effectively managed and led.

The Director for Growth and Regeneration, Assistant Director for Strategic Planning and Regulatory Services and the planning service managers have a key role in leading and driving the change required. The planning team itself will also play a vital role in shaping and responding to the changes. There is however a number of other roles and competencies required to support the changes:

- **Project Management** - for oversight of the implementation plan and co-ordination of activity.
- **Human Resources** – to support any required changes to structure, roles and responsibilities and to assist with recruitment and retention
- **Management and Leadership development** – to provide specific development support to the planning services management.
- **Business Process re-engineering** (including improved use of ICT) – to undertake a full review and re-engineering of application processes from receipt, registration, validation, determination through to notification.

Project leadership will be provided by the Director and Assistant Director, whilst a project manager will be appointed from the internal Corporate Improvement Team.

There are currently insufficient resources within the existing HR team to provide the necessary, intensive support to this project. It is therefore proposed that an additional full-time HR Officer role is created and appointed on a 1 year fixed term contract (with option to extend subject to requirement and available resources). It is anticipated the approximate cost of this role will be £50k including on costs.

This new role will provide direct support to the change process, as well as provide additional capacity to the wider HR function, enabling the council to more effectively respond to some of the other issues identified through the LGA Peer Challenge. The key focus for this role is therefore anticipated to include:

- Review of benefits and remuneration to ensure they meet the needs of the Council and consider market conditions.

- Maximising potential through talent management to include a review and implementation of best practice recruitment and retention practices as well as identification and planning of training and development activities; specifically within the planning and assets teams.
- Managing employee relations while supporting any required structure changes as a consequence of service reviews e.g. in planning.
- Co-ordination of leadership development support for planning (and other necessary services); potentially drawing in specialist support utilising existing training budgets.
- Delivery of workforce strategy and the Council's aspiration to be a "great place to work and build a career."
- Supporting any other organisational change required as part of the new corporate strategy development following the establishment of the new council.

To undertake the business process re-engineering of existing processes, an external specialist will be required. It is therefore proposed that a commissioning budget of £10k be created to enable this support to be procured. The scope of this commission is anticipated to be:

- Utilise an appropriate methodology to streamline, simplify and improve the receipt, registration, validation and determination of planning applications.
- To help design a new approach which reduces inefficient practices, improves officer ownership and accountability for individual applications and also provides much greater continuity for applicants and agents, improving communication and the customer experience.

By approving the utilisation of these additional resources the Council will be in a position to proceed with implementing the majority of recommendations within the review. It should be noted that some recommendations may require additional resources and this will be more fully assessed once the processes and potential future structures have been more thoroughly considered by the leadership and project team. Should ongoing additional resources be required a further report will be provided to members for approval as appropriate.

### **3.5 Changes to Planning Committee**

The Review Report sets out a number of proposed changes regarding the procedure rules and practices within the Planning Committee. These have been considered with the political leadership of the council and informally with the planning committee itself. On the basis of those discussions a new set of Planning Committee Procedure Rules have been drafted and considered alongside the wider constitutional review documents at the Governance Committee in March. They will be tabled for adoption at the Council meeting on 17th April. Subject to their approval, the new procedure rules will positively address a number of important recommendations within the review report and will enable the council to demonstrate to the public and external stakeholders a positive early response to issues identified.

## **4.0 POLICY AND CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 The Council's vision is "We are Ambitious for Melton's future. We want to enhance

the quality of life for everyone, by enabling more homes to be built, attracting quality jobs and supporting strong and prosperous communities.”

Key priorities which this report supports include:

- Developing a thriving town centre and rural offer, recognised as a great place to invest, live and visit.
- Increasing the availability of good quality homes that meet local needs
- Working with our partners to improve physical and digital infrastructure
- Delivering quality services to businesses and residents, understanding what matters to our customers
- Being a great place to work and build a career.

## **5.0 FINANCIAL AND OTHER RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

Additional resources in HR are being proposed to implement the recommendations from the planning review. This will ensure there is focused effort on delivering and implementing change during the 12 month period while also considering the wider corporate benefits.

- 5.1 The resources required to fund the necessary HR support and the process re-engineering can be met from a mix of the carry forward requested on the budget report elsewhere on this agenda and also from the resources being made available from the business rates pilot. The total amount available to the council from the business rates pilot has yet to be finalised and will be determined by the agreed split between the districts in Leicestershire, which is still subject to discussions, and also the final amount of business rates collected at the year end. These funds are to be spent on financial sustainability and housing and commercial infrastructure. The proposals in this report would fit within this criteria. It may also be appropriate to charge a portion of the HR costs to the Housing Revenue Account as the resource could also be used to support the review of the resources in that area and should that be the case this funding can be authorised through existing delegations. on the
- 5.2 It is anticipated that there will be changes to the structure of the planning team however the extent of this is currently unknown. The new HR Officer will ensure that good employee relations are maintained and ensure consultation with teams and unions throughout the process. The Council has established HR policies and procedures for managing such a review which will be followed throughout the process.

## **6.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS/POWERS**

- 6.1 The Town and Country Planning Act 1990 provides the local planning authority with a strategic role within the planning system with a statutory responsibility for management of delivery of planning services within its designated area including Development Control and Planning Policy making functions.

Planning legislation and related government guidance requires that the above services are provided in a professional and effective manner, and in particular that the decision making process is robust and transparent.

The Director for Legal and Democratic Services has considered the proposals set

out in this report and is satisfied that they will assist the local planning authority in effectively discharging its statutory duties as set out above.

## 7.0 COMMUNITY SAFETY

7.1 There are no direct community safety implications associated with the report

## 8.0 EQUALITIES

8.1 There are no direct equalities impacts associated with the report.

## 9.0 RISKS

9.1

<b>L I K E L I H O O D</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>Very High</b>				
	<b>B</b>	<b>High</b>				
	<b>C</b>	<b>Significant</b>		1		
	<b>D</b>	<b>Low</b>				
	<b>E</b>	<b>Very Low</b>				
	<b>F</b>	<b>Almost Impossible</b>				
			<b>Negligible 1</b>	<b>Marginal 2</b>	<b>Critical 3</b>	<b>Catastrophic 4</b>
			<b>IMPACT</b>			

<b>Risk No</b>	<b>Risk Description</b>
1	Failure to effectively resource the required changes will result in an ineffective implementation and wasted resources in commissioning the review.
2	
3	

## 10.0 CLIMATE CHANGE

10.1 There are no direct implications

## 11.0 CONSULTATION

11.1 Colleagues in the planning services team have been engaged in the development

of the review and the outcomes from the review have been shared with them. Through the project team, regular communication will be maintained with the team. All members have had the opportunity to comment on the new draft Planning Committee procedure rules and a discussion session has been held where all members were able to feed in their views. A wide variety of external stakeholders have been engaged in the review and will receive a summary of the findings and confirmation of next steps subject to the views of the Committee.

## 12.0 **WARDS AFFECTED**

12.1 The planning service has the potential to impact all wards.

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Date:                        28 March 2019

Appendices :            *None*

Background Papers:    Planning Review – Final Report, March 2019.

Reference :