

## RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL REPORT TO PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Agenda Item No. 6

meeting date: 28 SEPTEMBER 2017  
 title: STATISTICS AND PERFORMANCE INFORMATION REPORT 2016/2017  
 submitted by: DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICES  
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### 1 PURPOSE

1.1 To advise Members of details in relation to performance targets for the year 2016/2017 and is an elaboration of a report taken to this Committee on 31 August 2017 by Michelle Haworth.

1.2 The report also seeks to identify other aspects in relation to the Planning Service.

1.3 Relevance to the Council's ambitions and priorities

- Community Objectives }
  - Corporate Priorities }
  - Other Considerations }
- Monitoring performance ensures that we are able to strive for an excellent service for our community as well as meeting corporate priorities.

### 2 BACKGROUND

2.1 In relation to targets many of the actual performance targets are not only an important indicator in relation to service delivery but also a useful yardstick in relation to having regard to government targets and in particular in determination of planning applications.

2.2 Members will be aware of the report submitted by Michelle Haworth which gave an analysis of the 24 indicators included within the planning service. Members will recall that it indicated that whilst 50% of performance indicators were improved, there was also a situation where over nearly 46% worsened. I consider it useful to expand on some of the information.

### 3 ISSUES

#### Application Related Targets

3.1 Members will be aware that on 16 December 2016 DCLG wrote to the Chief Executive regarding "the speed with which applications for non-major development have been determined by your Council in relation to the period October 2014 to September 2016". They advised that the Council **may** be liable for designation under section 62A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. If that was to be the case there could have been serious implications as to how planning applications would be determined. However following dialogue between DCLG and Head of Planning information was submitted with associated justification that allowed for further consideration and it was agreed that the Council was not a designated authority.

- 3.2 Since 2016 the Development Management has continued to exceed the targets published by the DCLG in relation to all types of Planning applications as indicated in the table below.

Processing of Major planning applications	DCLG Target 15/16- 50% 16/17- 60%	RVBC figures 15/16-49% 16/17-100%
Processing of Minor applications	DCLG Target 15/16- 65% 16/17- 70%	RVBC figures 15/16- 37% 16/17- 83%
Processing of other applications	DCLG Target 15/16- 80% 16/17- 80%	RVBC figures 15/16- 63% 16/17- 85%

- 3.3 It is evident that there has been a significant improvement in the determination rate of planning application which is a result of various factors which include a more positive focus on the priority given to the determination of applications, fully resourced staffing levels, greater use of Extension of Times and the high level of delegated decisions to the Director of Community Services. Although the positive improvement is welcomed it is important to remain focused on both the quality as well as the speed of any decision. At the time of preparing this report there is at least one vacant post which will undoubtedly have a significant impact on service delivery.

#### Pre application advice

- 3.4 As part of the overall planning service Councils are encouraged to offer a pre application advice service and applicants are advised to make use of the service. Within the National Planning Policy Guidance the Government places an important emphasis on the value of pre-application (pre-app) engagement between applicants and the Local Planning Authority in order to improve both the efficiency and effectiveness of the planning application system and to improve the quality of planning application submissions and their likelihood of success.
- 3.5 The Government accepts that there is “no one-size fits all approach” to providing an efficient and effective pre-application service and therefore Local Authorities are encouraged to take a flexible, tailored and timely approach to the pre-application service they provide. Under section 93 of the Local Government Act 2003 Local Authorities have discretionary powers to charge for pre-application planning enquiries.
- 3.6 Members will be aware that the Council have a dedicated part time pre application officer with the post in existence since 2012. Ribble Valley Planning Authority is the only Local Authority within Lancashire to have a designated pre-application Planning Officer.
- 3.7 The Pre-app Officer deals with the vast majority of pre-application enquiries, however a small number of enquiries are sometimes dealt with by the Principal Planning Officers or the Head of Planning Services. Principal Planning Officers and other employees of the Council (eg Countryside Officers, Planning Policy Officers, Environmental Health Officers, Housing Officer) are also involved in a number of pre-applications when there specialist advice/input is required. The Pre-application service is managed by a Principal Planning Officer who works closely with the Pre-application Officer and checks all responses before they are issued.

- 3.8 The Council currently offers a pre-application service on a wide variety of application types, ranging from householder enquiries to large scale major developments. All pre-application enquires receive a written response and a meeting with the pre-application officer, with the exemption of the most basic householder enquiries where a meeting is not provided, unless specifically requested.
- 3.9 In line with Government Guidance, the timescale within which the LPA aims to formally reply to a pre-application requiring is dependent on the complexity of the enquiry, and the Council seeks to provide a formal written response within 5 weeks for householders with no meeting, and up to 8 weeks for large scale major developments.
- 3.10 In respect of fees, the current fees range from £50 for householder enquiries (without a meeting) to £1,000 for large scale major developments. A full breakdown of the fees and guidance notes are available for public viewing on the Council's website.
- 3.11 In addition to providing a valuable service for the public, the pre-application service is also self-funded as the income generated exceeds the measurable expenditure of the pre-application Officer post. In the year 2015 the Council received 160 pre-application enquiries, resulting in an income of approx. £35,000 and in 2016 this increased to 177 enquiries with an income of £44,000.
- 3.12 Approximately 1/3 of pre-application enquiries are for householders, 1/3 for minor developments (change of uses, small scale residential developments etc...) with the remainder made up of a variety of application types but mainly intermediate and major applications.
- 3.13 In the period between the end of March 2016 and April 2017 - 96 planning applications submitted to the Council had first obtained formal pre-application advice from the Council by way of an application.

#### Recent changes to the pre-app service

- 3.14 In the past 18 months the LPA has introduced a number of changes to the pre-application service, and these include the following:
- the appointment of a Principal Planning Officer to oversee the general management of the Pre-app Service and to review all responses before issue;
  - providing a daily "drop in session" for applicants to discuss general planning enquiries with Assistant Planning Officers free of charge (please note this service is not available for planning agents and currently is no longer offered whilst there are vacant posts);
  - an increase in the number of pre-application enquiry categories to provide greater flexibility;
  - increase in pre-application fees (as of April 2017);
  - acceptance of pre-apps submitted electronically;
  - guidance issued on estimated response times for pre-apps;
  - scanning all pre-application enquiries and responses for archive purposes;

- 3.15 Lancashire County Council in their roles as Highway Authority and Lead Local Flood Authority have recently decided to no longer offer a free pre application service and now charge for the advice.

### Significant Industrial Applications

- 3.16 The purpose of this section is to inform Members in relation to major applications that relate to significant industrial employment generating proposals since 2015 which actually confirms that the Council is supportive of industrial development in the borough and in line with the Councils policies and statements in the Core Strategy.
- 3.17 The following Key Statements and Policies apply from the Ribble Valley Core Strategy:

#### Key Statement EC1: Business and Employment Development

'Employment development will be directed towards the main settlements of Clitheroe, Whalley and Longridge as the preferred locations to accommodate employment growth together with land at Barrow Enterprise site, the Lancashire Enterprise Zone at Samlesbury and locations well related to the A59 corridor.

Developments that contribute to farm diversification, strengthening of the wider rural and village economies or that promote town centre vitality and viability will be supported in principle.

#### Key Statement EC2: Development of Retail, shops and community facilities and services

Development that supports and enhances the vibrancy, consumer choice and vitality and unique character of the area's important retail and service centres of Clitheroe, Longridge and Whalley will be supported in principle.

#### Key Statement EC3: Visitor Economy

Proposals that contribute to and strengthen the visitor economy of Ribble Valley will be encouraged, including the creation of new accommodation and tourism facilities through the conversion of existing buildings or associated with existing attractions.

#### Policy DMB1: Supporting business growth and the local economy

Proposals that are intended to support business growth and the local economy will be supported in principle.

#### Policy DMB3: Recreation and tourism development

Planning permission will be granted for development proposals that extend the range of tourism and visitor facilities in the borough.

It is useful to give an indication of recent approvals for significant industrial developments throughout the borough.

- 3.18 In 2015 there were two major applications and one minor application that were related to employment and industry. All three applications were approved. In 2016 there were two

major applications and two minor applications that were related to employment and industry. All four applications were approved. In 2017 two major applications and 3 minor industrial applications have been approved. Whereas approvals per se does not always automatically generate commencement of work Members will be aware of the ongoing activities at Holmes Mill, Industrial development at Salthill associated with Alpes, development at Barrow Brook as well as the former Genus site at Whalley.

#### 4 CONCLUSION

- 4.1 The determination rate of applications above the targets imposed by the DCLG is welcomed as is the progress made on pre application service and the promotion of appropriate industrial development but it is vital that the Council continue to monitor the service and delivery on a regular basis.

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