

## **WAVERLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

### **ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 19 MARCH 2018**

#### **EXECUTIVE – 10 APRIL 2018**

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#### **Title:**

### **DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT IMPROVEMENT PLAN PROGRESS UPDATE**

**[Portfolio Holder: Cllr Chris Storey]  
[Wards Affected: All]**

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#### **Summary and purpose:**

The purpose of the report is to provide Members with an update on completion of the actions set out in the Improvement Plan since it was agreed by the Executive in November 2018. There are five broad objectives each associated with a number of related work streams. Progress has been made on all actions with many completed. Timescales are provided for likely completion of outstanding actions and explanatory comment provided.

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#### **How this report relates to the Council's Corporate Priorities:**

The Service Improvement Plan has emerged as one of the work streams following on from the Strategic Review of Waverley Borough Council carried out by Cratus in 2016. The outcomes of the Plan support delivery of a more efficient and customer focussed service. The actions in the Plan contribute to Value for Money in so far as they will improve consistency and quality of decision making, particularly the training programmes supported by the Planning Advisory Service (PAS).

Development Management contributes to place shaping in the Borough through the delivery of a Spatial Strategy for development and decisions on planning applications. These support the overarching priorities of Community Wellbeing and Protection and Enhancement of the environment.

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#### **Financial Implications:**

Funding for the Improvement Plan has been set aside from the increased income being achieved due to the increase in statutory planning fees set out in legislation.

Improvements in service delivery and any efficiencies achieved will help the council achieve value for money and potentially help achieve savings in the future.

#### **Legal Implications:**

The Legal Services team support the Improvement Plan and the objectives set out therein. Achieving the identified objectives will lead to improvements in Development Management services and our ability to support the Development Management team in the future. Legal officers will continue to provide the necessary support to ensure that progress toward meeting the objectives continues.

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## **Introduction/Background:**

Following a review of the Development Management Service by Stewart Management and Planning Solutions Consultants in 2017, an Improvement Plan was produced setting out a number of areas for improvement. At its meeting on 28 November 2017, the Executive resolved that the Improvement Plan be adopted as the detailed Service Plan for Development Management.

The Executive also resolved that:-

- the timescales for achievement of work streams should be kept under review taking into account the availability of resources to support implementation of the Plan;
- Regular updates of progress on the Plan's action should be discussed and agreed with the Planning Portfolio Holder and a full update be reported to the Executive in April 2018.

The current report updates Members on the progress with actions in accordance with the Executive's decisions.

## **Progress Update:**

The updated Improvement Plan, together with detailed progress is attached at Annexe 1. The Plan included five broad objectives. These are set out below with a summary of progress on key actions.

Good progress has been made in most key areas. Other actions are ongoing and the updated Improvement Plan indicates the likely timescales for completion.

### **Update:**

#### **Objective 1 - Produce a Development Management Manual for use by officers**

Work has commenced on reviewing the existing Procedure Manual. Appeals procedures have been reviewed and updated. The Scheme of Delegation has been reviewed with particular reference to call-in procedures by members. The main sections of work are due to take place in March.

#### **Objective 2 - Implement and deliver a new IT system**

Scoping commenced in January 2018 with an alternative software provider with the intention of developing a new database environment. The service areas include Building Control, Development Management and Land Charges. The work is progressing.

#### **Objective 3 - Improve the tracking of all applications and overall project management of major applications**

Planning Performance Agreements are now regularly used to support delivery of major applications. A review of the pre-application response template has taken place. A new, more succinct, template will be launched in March taking into account the adoption of the Waverley Borough Council Local Plan Part 1. Through the budget process, additional resources have been committed towards improved monitoring of Section 106 Agreements.

#### Objective 4 - Improve quality of decision making and appeal performance

New report templates have been prepared and will be launched shortly, following the adoption of the Waverley Borough Local Plan Part 1. Standing advice to Members will be issued at the same time as the template's launch.

Delegated decision sign-off is taking place at the lowest accountable level.

A review of the number and structure of Planning Committees is being undertaken by Democratic Services. An option to participate in a PEER Review of Planning Committees has been offered by the Planning Advisory Service (PAS) to the Council. There is no cost for the PEER Review given the current support being offered to the Council in relation to appeals performance.

#### Objective 5 - Identify Officer and Member training requirements and deliver training programme for all decision makers

Member training is being delivered with the support of Democratic Services through the Planning Advisory Service (PAS). Some training for Planning Committee Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen is programmed for March. The Member design tour has been scheduled for March. Further training dates are being agreed.

The Parish and Town Council Planning Forums and the Agents' Forum have been reinstated to allow improved collaboration and communication with key stakeholders. The Planning Roadshow around the Parishes has been launched.

Officer training to focus on improved communication and customer service is being delivered with the support of PAS and the HR team. Internal workshops take place every month with the Planning Officers to provide useful forms of internal training. Topics cover a range of professional areas. Further training is being programmed.

#### **Resourcing/Review of Plan:**

In accordance with the Executive's resolution, the Improvement Plan's progress has been regularly monitored and reviewed by the Head of Planning Services together with the Planning Portfolio Holder. An additional staff resource was secured to support delivery of the Plan actions from January 2018 and this has helped expedite progress.

Completion of outstanding actions will be monitored by the Head of Planning Services and Portfolio Holder and this is expected by early Summer 2018, culminating in the roll out of the new IT system.

#### **Conclusion:**

The Improvement Plan is being successfully implemented. The expected outcomes of the Plan are expected to result in improved operational efficiency, customer and Member communication and effectiveness of decision making.

The key actions of the Improvement Plan have been incorporated and carried forward with the emerging Planning Service Plan for 2018/19 and will be supported by increased resourcing for the Service through recent Planning Fee increase and the approved budget for the Service for 2018/19.

## **Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

The Committee considered this report on 19 March 2018. The Committee noted the good progress being made, and was pleased that additional staff resource has been provided to drive forward delivery of the Action Plan as quickly as possible.

The Committee has some reservations about the Council developing its own bespoke IT database, but recognises that there are benefits to doing this in partnership with a provider rather than purchasing a product that does not meet the Council's requirements.

The Committee noted that a review of the Planning Committee structure was underway. No conclusions had been reached so far, and the Committee's Planning Reference Group would be consulted in due course.

### **Recommendation**

It is recommended that the good progress being made on the improvement plan be noted.

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### **Background Papers**

Report to Executive 28 November 2017

Planning Service Improvement Plan, Stewart Management & Planning Solutions, 2017

Strategic Review of Waverley Borough Council, December 2016, Cratus

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