

Report to Planning Applications Committee
6 February, 2014

Item

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Report of Head of Planning Services

Subject Performance of the Development Management Service,
Oct-Dec 2013 (Quarter 3, 2013-14)

Purpose

To report the performance of the development management service to members of the committee.

Recommendations

That the report be noted.

Financial Consequences

The financial consequences of this report are none.

Strategic Priority and Outcome/Service Priorities

The report helps to meet the strategic priority “Strong and prosperous city – working to improve quality of life for residents, visitors and those who work in the city now and in the future” and the implementation of the planning improvement plan.

Contact Officers

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Background Documents

None.

Report

Background

1. On 31 July 2008 Planning Applications Committee considered a report regarding the improved working of the Committee which included a number of suggested changes to the way the Committee operates. In particular it suggested performance of the development management service be reported to the Committee and that feedback from members of the Committee be obtained.

Performance of the development management service

2. Table 1 of the appendix provides a summary of performance indicators for the development management service. The speed of determining applications is National Indicator 157. Table 2 shows the numbers received, pending and on hand at the end of the quarter. The National Performance Indicators (NI157) for majors are a significant improvement on the previous quarter and are all above target and higher than the previous quarter.
3. Major schemes achieved 100% on time with all being determined within 13 weeks (37 percentage points higher than the previous quarter), 88.8% for minors (2 percentage points higher) and 82.6% for others (9 percentage points higher). The figures for majors, minors and others are all above the locally set targets of 80%, 85% and 90% respectively. The national average for quarter 1 being 59%, 68% and 82% respectively i.e. these are all exceeded by between 20 and 41 percentage points. The government has changed the way that it collects data so that major applications are now excluded from the NI157 data if the applicant has agreed a "post application agreement" i.e. there is mutual agreement between the applicant and council that the decision process is best served by extending the 13 week period. There were no such applications recorded this quarter – all majors were determined in 13 weeks.
4. The government has commenced collecting and publishing data on decisions made in 26 weeks as part of the "planning guarantee". From 1st October 2013, there are opportunities for applicants to request the refund of fees if decisions have taken longer than 26 weeks to determine, unless there is either a planning performance agreement signed pre-submission, or a written agreement to extend the time period for determination for major applications. In such cases the applications are not eligible for a refund and are excluded from the NI157 13 week performance data. In the last quarter all but one minor application was not dealt with in 13 weeks (and was an historic application to which the refund does not apply). This was a substantially higher figure compared to the previous two quarters.
5. Overall the data is very positive and results from improvements to processes to speed up the early stages of processing, a good quality pre-application advice service and improved information on the website, and more effective ways of working. There are very few old applications still pending and the future performance of the planning service should be close to target levels in the coming months.

6. The government has announced that it will take action if councils perform poorly on major applications or have a very poor appeal success rate. This will result in “designation” and applicants would then have the right to bypass the local planning authority and have the application dealt with by the planning Inspectorate. It is not anticipated that there will be any issues in Norwich with the appeal rate of success. However, care will have to be taken with respect to the monitoring of the speed of handling major applications over the coming months. “Designation” will be linked to previously submitted NI157 data. The government has suggested a figure of 40% in 13 weeks for the two years ending 30th June 2014 (compared to 30% in last autumn’s designation round) then the council would be designated by a decision made in the autumn of 2014. Applicants would then have the option of submitting applications direct to the Planning Inspectorate and the council would lose the planning fee. However, and more importantly, designation would have reputational harm, and have negative impacts on trust by developers in the proper working of the planning function.
7. For the two years ending 30th June 2013 the figure for determination of major applications in 13 weeks was 39.7%, above the government’s floor for “designation” of 30%. The government has suggested that it may increase the minimum figure to 40% for the next round. For the latter half of that period, however, the figure is 30.2% so it will be very important that the figures for the year 1 July 2013 – 30 June 2014 are excellent to avoid a risk of designation in the autumn of next year. The cumulative figure for the five quarters ending 30th September, 2013 was 42.8% and for 6 quarters ending 31st December it was 47.8%. The remaining two quarters should be in excess of this level and so the final outturn for the 2014 designation round is expected to be well above the existing or possible designation thresholds.
8. The percentage of decisions delegated to officers was 92.7% (previous quarter 86.1%). The national average for district council’s is 91%.

APPENDIX

Table 1

Speed of determination of planning applications recorded by National Indicator 157

	2008 - 2009	2009 - 2010	2010 - 2011	2011 - 2012	2012 - 2013					2013 - 2014				
	Year	Year	Year	Year	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Year	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Year
Major % 13 wks	37%	72.5%	75.7%	52.9%	77.7%	50%	14.2%	7.1%	35%	50%	68.5%	100%		
% 26 wks	47.4%	73.8%	88.9%	73.5%	88.8%	90%	28.6%	35.7%		58.3%	73.6%	100%		
Minor % 8 wks	75%	88.4%	78.9%	67.2%	81.5%	69.6%	66.1%	63.3%	73.4%	70%	86.5%	88.8%		
% 26 wks			99.6%	95.9%	97.7%	98.5%	100%	96.6%		96.2%	95.9%	98.4%		
Others % 8 wks	80%	90.3%	89.6%	81.6%	86.4%	77.2%	78.6%	82.4%	81.1%	85.5%	83.9%	92.6%		
% 26 weeks			99.6%	97.9%	100%	98.6%	100%	97.7%		100%	98.5%	100%		

Table 2**Numbers of planning applications recorded by National Indicator 157**

	2010 - 2011				2011 - 2012				2012 - 2013				2013 - 2014			
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Received	212	222	197	255	184	245	176	221	273	255	171	207	223	193	188	
Withdrawn/called in	15	11	19	15	9	21	10	8	17	6	8	8	5	25	9	
On hand (pending) at end of quarter	144	132	136	206	169	160	119	179	190	154	149	173	168	104	106	
Decisions	197	222	174	169	212	232	203	157	246	223	167	175	223	231	178	