

# Planning Transformation Business Case - Interim Report

## Planning Policy Committee Thursday, 23 September 2021

Report of: Chief Executive

---

Purpose: For information

---

Publication status: Open

Wards affected: All

---

### Executive summary:

Following the review by the Planning Advisory Service (PAS) the Council has agreed the need for a transformation programme to be commenced with the aim of building a high performing, resilient and reputationally strong Planning Service.

As outlined in the Planning Service Transformation report that was presented to the special Planning Policy Committee on the 26 August 2021, this interim report sets out the first phase of the Transformation Project.

This report also outlines the key workstreams that will feed into the final business case together with an overview of the work which has already commenced.

The final business case will be brought to the November Planning Policy Committee.

---

**This report supports the Council's priority of:** Building a better Council.

**Contact officer** Jayne Roberts - jroberts@tandridge.gov.uk –

---

### Recommendation to Committee:

That this interim report be noted.

---

### Reason for recommendation:

To support the development of the business case with the aim of ensuring the best possible outcomes in terms of structure, staffing, resilience, value for money and Councillor/Officer engagement.

---

## **1.0 Key workstreams**

### **1.1 Structure**

- 1.1.1 An activity spreadsheet has been developed which will be completed by all Officers of the Development Management (DM) team. The outcomes from this piece of work will inform decision making regarding the re-alignment of the team structure, job titles, reporting lines, capacity and resilience.
- 1.1.2 A benchmarking exercise using the government performance metric comparing Local Authorities of a similar size with comparable constraints and staffing numbers is currently underway and will form part of the business case that will be brought to this Committee on 25<sup>th</sup> November 2021.

### **1.2 Resource**

- 1.2.1 The process of validating planning applications has been identified as an area of concern in the PAS report. To address the issues raised a health check of the validation process will be undertaken by an experienced validation team leader from a neighbouring local authority. Dependant on the outcome of the health check a training programme will be put in place and overseen by an external provider.
- 1.2.2 Results from the activity analysis see 1.1 will highlight areas where internal cross skilling and training is required. Any single points of failure that are identified will be dealt with as a priority.
- 1.2.3 To progress the training and development of Officers a clear career path will be introduced. The re-introduction of career grades together with apprenticeships and graduate programmes will be considered subject to guidance from the HR Business Lead for Planning.
- 1.2.4 Further training in Salesforce, together with a training video and/or accompanying training notes will take place to assist Officers involved in running reports in Salesforce. This will assist them to monitor their respective workloads.
- 1.2.5 Regular attendance of the Surrey Validation Group Meetings by a member of the Validation team needs to be re-introduced. This forum informs best practice, provides networking opportunities, updates on Policy changes and bench marking exercises.
- 1.2.6 Complaints have been made against the Planning department during the last quarter. It is recommended that all DM officers attend a complaint handling training course and a dealing with difficult people training course if they have not already done so.

## **1.3 Systems and Processes**

- 1.3.1 A peer review of our existing planning performance reporting will take place shortly. Any required changes to the format of our reports will be undertaken as a priority.
- 1.3.2 An IT issues log has been set up together with an in-box where Officers of the DM team submit requests for upgrades and improvements. A weekly meeting is held with the IT team to review and resolve issues.
- 1.3.3 The Civica (document storage system) is being upgraded to the latest version later in the year. We will be working with the IT team to improve the interface between Civica, the Planning Portal and Salesforce.
- 1.3.4 A re-platforming of the Planning Portal is currently underway with the first workshops for local authorities taking place at the end of October 2021. In the meantime, a meeting has been organised with the Planning Portal team to discuss improvements to the Planning Portal Service and how we can maximise them.
- 1.3.5 A platform review of our Geographical Information System has recently taken place with a view to streamlining and upgrading our existing GIS software.

### **1.3.6 Improvements to the web site have been agreed with the IT team as follows:**

- The ability to register for email notifications for planning applications in a specific parish/ward/post code will be reinstated.
- Work is underway to enable the generation of a weekly list by an adjustable date option and download into a pdf document on our web site.
- Additional wording will be added to highlight where the planning history related to a planning application can be viewed.
- Work has begun on re-instating the date in the "comments until" box on the search planning application web page.

## 2.0 Member/Officer Relations

### 2.1 Agreed actions to date are as follows: -

- Gilian MacInnes started to develop the Planning Protocol but was unable to complete it due to time constraints. A workshop will be set up to progress the development of the Planning Protocol comprising of Officers and Members.
- The DM team are all now available to take calls between 9 and 10am every working day. The time frame will be extended when Officer's caseloads decrease.
- Government Live Tables on Planning Application Statistics will be included in the standard performance and risk report to be reported on a quarterly basis to PPC.
- Planning Enforcement statistics will also be included in the standard performance and risk report to be reported on a quarterly basis to PPC.
- An Informal Planning Forum will be introduced. A Planning Officer with previous experience of Informal Planning Forums will lead on this work stream.

### 3.0 Associated Risks

Risk	Mitigation
Failure to implement changes arising from the report where there are legal implications.	Engage fully with the Legal department and follow any Legal advice they provide.
Failure to follow correct procedures relating to HR policies.	Engage fully with the HR Business Partner and follow any advice she provides.
Risk of project running over the timeline that has been set incurring extra costs.	Closely monitor costings and timelines of the work streams to mitigate the risk of running over budget. Fully explore potential cost savings as part of this project.
Rejection of the proposed Business Case by the Planning Policy Committee	Keep Councillors fully informed on the progress of the project and ensure the agreed criteria of the project are met.

Risk	Mitigation
Project/programme work puts strain on DM BAU work leading to underperformance.	Ensure Officers only get involved in the programme works if absolutely necessary.
Staff resigning due to the improvement works.	Involve Officers in the process and provide progress updates to staff as the business case is developed.
Staff resigning due to improvements in the service not taking place.	Any recommendations from the business case need to be taken forward on completion of this project through a programme management plan.
Lack of resource to prepare Supplementary Planning Policy Documents resulting in a lack of supporting local policies to inform planning application decisions.	Provision of extra resource for the Planning Policy team to enable this work to be carried out.

#### **4.0 Consultation**

- 4.1 This interim report, including the proposed actions and work streams that are currently being progressed, have been carried out in consultation with the Chairs of the Planning Applications and Planning Policy Committee together with suggestions put forward by Cllr Duck.

#### **5.0 Potential costings**

- 5.1 Details of how potential costings will be arrived at/calculated will be developed as part of the business case during Phase 1. The costings below are indicative and subject to the findings of the work streams currently underway to determine where extra resources are required.

Health Check and Training for the Validation Team – to be confirmed

Extra staffing 1 x Principal Planner (M4) including on costs £62,000 per annum

2 x Planning Officers (M1) £39,000 per annum x 2 = £78,000 per annum  
= Total staffing costs £140,000 ongoing additional cost

- 5.2 The funding for any extra resources identified in the business case are subject to the agreement of the Chief Executive, Section 151 Officer and Members.

## **Key implications**

### **Comments of the Chief Finance Officer**

Significant work is underway to improve the functioning of the Planning Service but there is much work still to do.

In recognition of the additional resource needed to implement the changes necessary the Planning Policy Committee is being excluded from having to find any savings towards the budget gap for the 2022/23 budget process. The Committee will also be able to put forward its proposals for growth items in their budget.

The Council may be able to fund the cost of the transformation work needed via the flexible use of capital receipts. The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government issued guidance in March 2016, giving local authorities greater freedoms with how capital receipts can be used to finance expenditure. This Direction allows for the following expenditure to be treated as capital:

“expenditure on any project that is designed to generate ongoing revenue savings in the delivery of public services and/or transform service delivery to reduce costs and/or transform service delivery in a way that reduces costs or demand for services in future years for any of the public-sector delivery partners.”

To comply with the direction the Council must prepare, publish and maintain a flexible use of capital receipts strategy. The strategy for 2021/22 will be updated during the year and taken to Council for approval. It is likely that at least part of the planning transformation work will be funded via this route.

### **Comments of the Head of Legal Services**

There are risks associated with a planning service not meeting Government thresholds for decision making. If performance falls below the thresholds, then the Council can be designated by Government and have local decision making powers directed to the Planning Inspectorate. The Council clearly does not wish to reach that position. This paper reports that a series of enhancements are underway, and which will start to achieve tangible improvements in service delivery. More transformation work will be required over and above those set out in this report, but the foundations are being put in place for creating a stronger planning team fit to deliver the Council's ambitions. Achieving this ambition will inevitably require investment in resources and infrastructure as part of the Council's transformation project.

## **Corporate implications**

Any corporate implications relating to the Planning Transformation Business Case will be taken to Planning Policy Committee on the 25<sup>th</sup> November 2021 as part of the final report.

## **Equality**

This report contains no proposals that would disadvantage any minority groups.

## **Climate change**

This report contains no proposals that would impact on the council's commitment to climate change.

## **Appendices**

None

## **Background papers**

None

----- end of report -----