



Report to Deputy Leader

Decision to be taken on or after **9 May 2003**

Decision will be implemented 3 clear days after signature

Cabinet Member Report No. **DL03/03**

Title: Best Value Improvement Plan for Planning Services

Date: 30 April 2003

Author: Head of Spatial Planning

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Electoral Divisions Affected: ALL

Overview and Scrutiny Committees: Environment and Lifelong Learning

Summary

The report summarises key issues arising from the Best Value Review and seeks approval of the Improvement Plan.

Recommendation

That following the Best Value Review of Planning Services the attached Improvement Plan be approved by the Deputy Leader in order to secure continuous service improvement subject to available resources.

A. Narrative setting out the reasons for the decision

The Best Value Review of Planning Services was considered by Cabinet on 22nd July 2002. Consultation on the outcome of the review and initial draft of the Improvement Plan (IP) with considered by the Strategic Plans Policy Advisory Group on 19th September 2002 and by Development Control Committee at their meeting on 22nd October 2002. Staff consultation concluded on Wednesday 2nd October 2002.

Whilst the review restricted itself to Planning Services (Strategic Planning, Minerals and Development Control) it contained draft recommendations for the Spatial Planning Division as a whole.

Extracts of the Best Value Review summary document are attached as **Appendix 2**. The Improvement Plan has been amended to take account of comments received and the final draft version of the IP is attached at **Appendix 1**.

Overall the Improvement Plan aims to deliver **the Planning elements** of an integrated Planning and Environment Service which:-

- is able to deliver **sustainable development** through the effective management of the environmental, social and economic pressures facing Bucks.
- is focused on delivering the Council's Community Planning and Council Plan objectives for the **environment and economy** of Buckinghamshire.

- is recognised by customers as being active, responsive and capable of **making a real difference to the quality of life** in Buckinghamshire.
- **achieves critical service outcomes** based on strong and effective partnership and the ability to demonstrate and influence at local, Sub-Regional and Regional levels.
- secures **upper quartile performance and continuous improvement** within available resources.

The Improvement Plan for Planning Services identifies three key areas of challenge:

Organisational
Cultural ,and
Operational.

B. Other options available, and their pros and cons

Failure to adopt the Improvement Plan will result in the Service failing to meet National Performance Targets and emerging Comprehensive performance assessment criteria. The Plan is essential in order for the Service to contribute to the Council's objectives of Achieving top Performance.

C. Resource implications

The costs in the first year associated with delivering the Improvement Plan were provisionally costed as follows:

- Staff restructuring in Planning Services including appointment of development control technician £80,000
- Increased service publicity including introduction of public speaking £40,000
- Recruitment and retention of professional planning staff £30,000

The Medium Term Planning budget bids were not successful and improvements have therefore to be secured from within the Services existing budget. This will result in the need to review priorities within the Improvement Plan. Those actions requiring limited funding will be pursued. Some of the improvements have been incorporated into individual Business Plans for Development Control and Strategic Planning and feature within the Planning and Environment Service Plan for 2003/04. Increased customer focus within the Development Control Service is to be supported by an additional staff member at a junior level being accessible from November 2003.

D. Feedback from consultation and Local Member views

The Improvement Plan is a direct result of the Best Value Review of Planning Services, comprehensive consultation was undertaken as part of this Review.

The Best Value Review of Planning Services was considered by Cabinet on 22nd July 2002. Consultation on the outcome of the review and initial draft of the Improvement Plan (IP) with staff, members and District Council's commenced on 18th September 2002. The IP was considered by the Strategic Plans Policy Advisory Group on 19th September 2002 and by Development Control Committee at their meeting on 22nd October 2002. Staff consultation concluded on Wednesday 2nd October 2002.

The Cabinet Member for Planning and Transportation and the Chairman of Development Control Committee have seen and approved the Best Value

Improvement Plan for Planning Services. The Best Value PAG considered the improvement Plan on 3 December 2002 and supported the action.

Your questions and views

If you have any questions about the matters contained in this paper please get in touch with the Contact Officer whose telephone number is given at the head of the paper.

If you have any views on this paper that you would like the Cabinet Member to consider, or if you wish to object to the proposed decision, please inform the Democratic Services Team by 5.00pm on Thursday 8 May 2003. This can be done by telephone (to 01296 383602), Fax (to 01296 382538), or e-mail to cabinet@buckscc.gov.uk

APPENDIX1- PLANNING SERVICES IMPROVEMENT PLAN – ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE

| ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE | COMMENTARY/TIMESCALE | LEAD |
|---|--|-----------------------------------|
| <p>1. That to provide greater clarity and customer understanding the service be renamed: Planning and Environment</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Effective from March 31st 2003 ➤ Service profile raising event May 2003 | <p><u>HoSP</u> ALL</p> |
| <p>2.. A single service plan be prepared, aimed at providing a coordinated planning and environment service for Buckinghamshire with the critical service outcomes clearly identifiable.</p> | <p><u>Service Plan</u> <u>March 2003</u></p> | <p><u>HoSP/Group Managers</u></p> |
| <p>3. That the structure of the Service as a whole be simplified into two broad service areas : Planning and Development Services (Strategic planning , development control, and development services including Economic development). Environment Services (expanded waste function ,countryside and gypsy services) The details of the revised structure be subject to a specific consultation with staff, following clarification of funding bids being progressed via the medium Term Plan.</p> | <p><u>Structure to be consulted upon and actioned following outcome of 2003/4 budget setting . Jan /Feb 2003</u></p> | <p><u>HoSP</u></p> |
| <p>4. That in relation to planning services the structure and work programme of the Strategic Planning Team be reviewed in the light of the Reform of Planning with the view to strengthening Regional and Sub-Regional Planning capacity, consolidating forward planning functions, strengthening monitoring and information functions.</p> | <p><u>Subject to timing of 3. above and Government proposals and legislative change . April 2003</u></p> | <p><u>CJK</u></p> |
| <p>5. That the structure of the Development Control and Enforcement Group be reviewed in order to deliver a programme to secure greater customer focus and planned service improvements in accordance with the Planning Officers Society Excellence Model.</p> | <p><u>Jan /Feb 2003</u></p> | <p><u>JDLP</u></p> |
| <p>6. That support to the Deputy Leader on Economic Development, Agenda 21, External Funding and European Services be consolidated into a new development services group .</p> | <p><u>Structure to be consulted upon and actioned following outcome of 2003/4 budget setting . Jan /Feb 2003</u></p> | <p><u>HoSP</u></p> |

PLANNING SERVICES IMPROVEMENT PLAN – CULTURAL CHANGE

| CULTURAL CHANGE | COMMENTARY/TIMESCALE | LEAD |
|--|---------------------------------------|--|
| | Dec 2002 onwards | Hosp /GM's /all |
| 2 That the Services emphasis on Performance Management be further developed through revised targets in its Service Plan and the creation of clearer targets in the Structure Plan Review. That the staff resource required to support this be kept under review. | <u>Service Plan</u> <u>March 2003</u> | <u>HoSP/Group Managers</u> |
| 3 That key service managers work with the Head of Spatial Planning to effect a cultural change within the service, based on the Council's eight key values . That this is then cascaded through the team structures of the Service. | <u>Dec 2002 onwards</u> | <u>HoSP/Group Managers</u> |
| 4 That updated market testing be undertaken of professional planning staff within Strategic Planning and Development Control, including a review of benefits and retention packages in order to overcome difficulties in filling vacant posts and retaining suitably qualified staff. | <u>Immediate</u> | <u>Human resources /HoSP/ Group Managers</u> |
| 5 That Strategic Planning and Development Control should continue to support career graded structures , which promote the in-house development of staff with the ability to operate more flexibly across service areas. | <u>Ongoing</u> | <u>Group Managers</u> |

PLANNING SERVICES IMPROVEMENT PLAN – OPERATIONAL CHANGE

| OPERATIONAL CHANGE | COMMENTARY/TIMESCALE | LEAD |
|---|---|---------------|
| 1 That further scoping with the District Council Chief Planning Officers be undertaken in order to establish the extent to which County and District Planning Services could be jointly resourced in the future. | Subject to timing of Government proposals and legislative change . April 2003 onwards | HoSP |
| 2 That a programme of operational improvements be made to the Development Control Service in accordance with the Planning Officers Society Excellence Model. (see details attached) | <u>See schedule</u> | <u>JDLP</u> |
| 3 That a programme of operational improvements be made to the Planning Policy/Forward planning function in accordance with the Planning Officers Society Excellence Model .(see details attached) | <u>See schedule</u> | <u>CJK/GL</u> |
| 4 That a programme of operational improvements be made to the Archaeological service in accordance with the Buckinghamshire Archaeological Management Plan.(see details attached) | | |
| 5 That electronic service delivery be pursued across the service, including the need to bring on stream the Development Control Management System. | <u>Updated web pages already actioned plus existing Consultation documents accessible on line- B.C.C first County Council in the Country to sign up to the planning portal programme.</u> DCMS system to be live summer 2003 | <u>GM's</u> |

DEVELOPMENT CONTROL

BEST VALUE REVIEW OPERATIONAL SERVICE IMPROVEMENTS

| Improvement | Timing | Resource issue/Lead |
|---|--|--|
| 1. Publish Development Control Charter covering service standards, access to service and advice, guidance on using the service. Review guidance for applicants and application forms. | To Development Control Committee January 03 | JDLP to lead. |
| 2. Improved user services, including:- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing for public speaking at Committee. • Feedback to consultees, objectors, etc on outcome of applications/response to concerns*. • Establishing protocols with key consultees on response times. • Providing feedback to applicants on consultee progress. • Co-ordination of all public consultations by DCT. • Providing copies of applications more widely, e.g Parish Councils, libraries, etc. • Providing improved public notification material. • Formal user satisfaction April 2003 → March 2004. • Regular user surveys to find out about satisfaction levels and user requirements. | By 30/06/03 By 30/06/03 “ “ “ “ 2003/04 Ongoing from March 03 | Requires new Development Control Technician (DCT) to deliver. *Will require additional time from DC case workers.)) CH to co-ordinate |
| 3. Feedback from Site Liaison Committees to consider and compare - main issues encountered, attendance, matters resolved, matters outstanding, lessons learned, provide feedback to development control committee etc. | By 31/03.03 | DCT/CH to co-ordinate with Liaison Committee Chairmen |
| 4. Produce revised development control checklist/status sheet. Update checklists for architects/adopt revised procedures for County Council applications. | By 31/10/03 (in course of preparation) | JDLP/DC Team. |

| Improvement | Timing | Resource issue/Lead |
|---|---|---|
| 5. Revise DC Manual and make available to public. | By 31/12/02 | DP to lead. |
| 6. Produce Enforcement Charter covering: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Criteria for action. • Strategy. • Priorities. • Timescales for response, action, etc. • Enforcement concordat. | 31/01/03 | DS/JDLP, but depending on enforcement caseload. |
| 7. Member services including:- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adopting new Code of Conduct. • Initiating and updating member training. • Using power point photos at Committee. | 31/03/03 From late 2002 From 2003 | JDLP/MCAD to lead. Central Administration. DCT to co-ordinate. |
| 8. Planning Officer training, including:- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training for use of IT equipment. • Legal and technical knowledge courses and in-house seminars to reflect on procedures and practice and update on changes. | Autumn 2002 onwards Ongoing | All staff involved |
| 9. Improved County Council applications - liaise with service departments on content of applications and pre-application discussions. | Autumn 2002 onwards | JDLP/RT |
| 10. Working with District Councils, including:- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing information/access to information at District Council offices; • Shared training opportunities. • Re-activate Development Control Officers Group. | By 31/03/03 | JDLP to pursue. |

| Improvement | Timing | Resource issue/Lead |
|--|--|--|
| <p>11. Ensure proper import into following areas:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responding to strategic and other consultations. • Improving site monitoring frequency to stated Local Plan standard (or revised level). • Ensuring proper import to other major developments, e.g. Central Railway. | <p>From 1/4/03</p> | <p>Additional trainee required to free up experienced planning officer time and add flexibility.</p> |
| <p>12. Secure electronic service delivery, including:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drawing up Project Plan. • Establishing and delivering training programme. • Implementation of PAC system. • System 'proving'. • Development of planning portal, electronic submission, processing of applications, etc. | <p>30/9/02 Autumn 2002 December 2002 Jan-May 2003 Summer 2003 onwards.</p> | <p>PT to lead pro tem. All DC staff involved. Possible knock-on effects on service during this time of staff development and need for extra Admin support.</p> |
| <p>13. Further improvement to user services and include:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved reception facilities/availability of information. • Review of hours of work/committee. • Better focus/reporting of complaints and compliments. • Policy on access to documents, charges, etc. • Better links with other services, e.g. Highways DC. | | <p>Subject to corporate decisions and timescales.</p> |

| Improvement | Timing | Resource issue |
|--|---|---|
| <p>14. Implement the Buckinghamshire Archaeological Management Plan, including :-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secure long-term future delivery of archaeology planning and conservation service • Improve community engagement and electronic service delivery through the "Unlocking Buckinghamshire's Past" Project • Complete the Bucks Historic Landscape Project to support strategic planning and countryside services • Secure funding for a Bucks Extensive Urban Survey Project to support strategic planning and development control • Participate to the Solent-Thames sub-Regional Research Frameworks Project to lead sub-regional historic environment policies • Support and develop heritage conservation and community archaeology initiatives, especially through links with the Countryside Strategic Initiatives Team, Chilterns Conservation Board and DEFRA • Implement the SMR Action Plan to meet emerging national "Benchmarks for Good Practice" • Explore options for an Bucks Historic Environment Record with partners in light of emerging government policy • Improve Member awareness of historic environment issues | <p>2005 onwards</p> <p>2003 to 2005</p> <p>2002 – 4</p> <p>for 2004 start</p> <p>2003 - ?</p> <p>ongoing</p> <p>ongoing</p> <p>October 2002 onwards</p> | <p>Need third permanent post (scale 5)</p> <p>Need to secure HLF grant (£7k match funding)</p> <p>EH funded</p> <p>EH funded</p> <p>EH funded + existing resources + (£0.5k)</p> <p>Projects under development. Budgets tbc</p> <p>Temporary support for backlog reduction (£4.5k).</p> |

PLANNING POLICY

BEST VALUE REVIEW OPERATIONAL SERVICE IMPROVEMENTS

| Improvement | Timing | Resource issue |
|---|--|----------------|
| <p>1. Ensure staff structure and resource to effectively service Structure Plan EIP and Minerals and Waste Local Plan inquiries whilst also ensuring input to the emerging Milton Keynes and South Midlands Study.</p> | <p>Immediate plus implementation of revised structure and future funding bid</p> | <p>CJK/GL</p> |
| <p>2. Secure improved customer focus including:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publish Forward Planning Customer Charter in light of County Council's revised role in both Regional, sub-regional and local planning • Development of planning forum • Action on engaging with hard to reach groups • Clarify role of County and District Planning Authorities | <p>June 2003. Subject to funding confirmation to cover costs of planning forum and revised structure</p> | <p>CJK /GL</p> |
| <p>3. New Structure and Local Plans include specific key objectives and performance targets and revised monitoring procedures</p> | <p>Being actioned in production of deposit Structure Plan and Waste and Minerals Local Plans. Summer 2003. Revised monitoring function subject to revised structure.</p> | <p>CJK</p> |
| <p>4. Structure Plan to consider, be informed by and integrated with the community plan including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • public awareness of role and scope of both plans • seize opportunities for shared information gathering | <p>Being actioned.</p> | <p>CJK/AMS</p> |

| Improvement | Timing | Resource issue |
|--|--|----------------|
| 5. Secure and resource a formal monitoring procedure for all forward planning functions and <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • monitor community expectations • performance against key objectives • strategic appeal decisions in association with District Councils | Subject to revised structure being implemented – Autumn 2003 | CJK |
| 6. Provide policy framework for S106 Agreements in structure and local plans including the establishment of mechanisms to secure developer contributions towards the cost of infrastructure. | To be commenced post Structure plan EIP Autumn 2003 | CJK/GL |
| 7. Secure electronic service delivery including:- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • plans published on the internet linked to planning portal • service guide on the internet • response to consultations | Already actioned in relation to current draft plans . Consultation responses to be published following revised structure being implemented – Autumn 2003 | CJK/GL |
| 8. Develop role of forward planning as a facilitator for change by identifying key research /development projects with District Council's on issues which will secure improved urban and rural environments in Bucks. | Programme to be confirmed end of 2003 | CJK/GL |
| 9. Planning Officer training including:- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • use of IT equipment • technical and legal knowledge, presentation of evidence etc. | Ongoing | |

Buckinghamshire County Council

Best Value Review of Planning Services

Draft Improvement Plan

1.0 INTRODUCTION

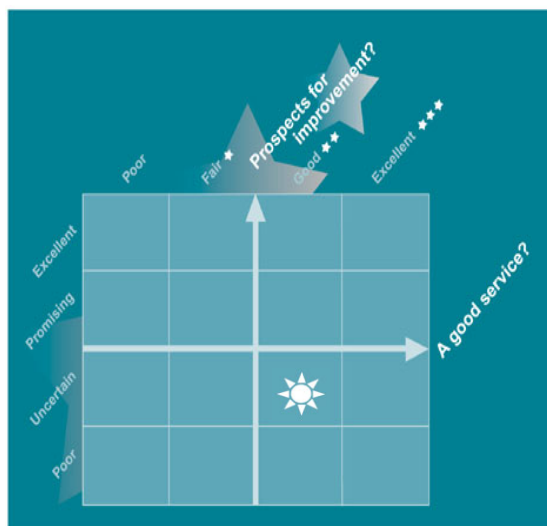
1.1 The Best Value Review of Planning Services was considered by Cabinet on 22 July 2002.

The key findings of the review have been considered, together with the findings of recent Best Value Inspections of Planning Services at Bedfordshire, (Development Control) and Reading and Portsmouth Unitaries, to inform this Improvement Plan.

1.2 If we had been subject to an Inspection prior to producing this Plan, how would the service have been assessed?

Scoring the Service

1 We would have assessed the Council as providing a good, two star Service overall, but in the absence of an effective Improvement Plan an uncertain prospect for Improvement and the potential for the service to be considered fair.



'a good service that has uncertain prospects for improvement'

2 We believe that the services are two star services because they showed a significant number of positive features, including:

- A revised Service Plan with clear linkages to the Councils Plan priorities and clear set of targets produced with member consultation and input.
- Improved Development Control Performance on decision making 2001/02 to 2002/03 to place the authority at the top of the upper quartile of County Councils.

- Satisfaction on enquiries to the Council (20% Planning and Development) show high levels of satisfaction 64% (MORI 2002).
- The Enforcement service has a significant level of activity in direct response to member wishes to effectively control development.
- The Structure Plan Review – ‘Shaping the Future’ has achieved widespread public connectivity, response rates significantly greater than reviews undertaken elsewhere and with high customer satisfaction rates on the clarity of the document.
- Evidence of influence and positive outcomes on Regional Planning issues over several years.
- High levels of public satisfaction on Waste and Minerals Local Planning and effective linkages to joint authority working on a Waste Strategy for Buckinghamshire.
- Effective Partnership working with District Councils on the Structure Plan Review through the Joint Panel and Urban Capacity Studies.
- Recent improvements to the Spatial Planning Divisions Website and accessibility of key documents electronically.
- Joint working with the business community through the Buckinghamshire Economic Partnership.
- Good response rates to Archaeological Consultations and evidence of strong partnership working to improve the service.
- Evidence of significant strategic inputs to sustainability planning, rural strategy development and economic development through direct action and partnership work.

3 Many of the above outcomes for customers and local communities are characteristic of top performing planning services. **However, we consider that a number of key weaknesses have been identified that are important enough to customers to question the services further prospects for improvement and could result in a reduction in the quality of service unless action is taken.**

Developing a Strategic Role in Delivering Sustainable Development

- The need to maintain and resource a high level of public connectivity in striking the right balance between environmental protection and development in Buckinghamshire.
- The need to secure integration with the emerging Community Strategy priorities and show how the service reflects these needs and aspirations, including those of hard-to-reach groups.
- The need to secure resources to deliver improved performance on cross-cutting authority actions on sustainability, rural strategy and economic development – building on the links between land use planning and these key delivery agents.

Securing an Improved Customer Focus

- The need to maintain the momentum of cultural change in the transition from delivery of a professional based service within customer and/or community constraints, to one that delivers a community or customer based service within professional and financial constraints.

- The need to address the lack of user involvement, other than Members of the Council, in the preparation of service plans, target setting and monitoring of performance.
- The need to address the lack of a Customer Charter for Planning Services.
- The need to improve the amount and extent of information available to the public on social, economic and environmental trends in Buckinghamshire.
- The need to secure effective feedback from Site Liaison Committees.

Strengthening Joint Working to Improve Customer Focus and Performance

- The need to investigate opportunities for improved joint working and service provision with District Councils.
- The need to secure greater public profile and access to the service through improved linkages with District Council receptions and development of operational linkages to secure a “One-Stop-Shop”
- The need to have clarified the operation and approach to Section 106 Agreements to users of the service through the provision of supplementary planning guidance.
- The need to maintain and strengthen working relationships with Milton Keynes in the light of increasing growth pressures.

Achieving Upper Quartile Performance and Securing Continuous Improvement

- The need to clearly aim for upper quartile performance, embracing excellence in both policy and development control in accordance with the POS Excellence Model.
- The need to further strengthen the focus on performance, including improved monitoring and coordination of performance data across the service area and benchmarking with comparator authorities.
- The need to effectively involve key users of the service in securing continuous improvement.
- The need to secure the effective introduction of the new Development Control Management System.
- The need to link with the Government funded Planning Portal and secure improved public access through e-government, in partnership with the District Councils.
- the need to deliver quality in the outcome of development and clearly identify added value in the development process

Being Adaptable and Proactive to new Demands/Legislative Change/Opportunities

- The need for the Strategic Planning service to be able to act in a new capacity for/with the Regional Planning Body – to be proactive in offering service support for both Regional and Sub-Regional Planning services – and focused on securing influence against a background of uncertain legislative change.
- The need to secure revised working arrangements with District councils on Local Development Frameworks in the light of imminent legislative change.

Being Adequately Resourced

- The need to secure resources to deliver the increased focus on performance, customer focus and electronic service delivery.
- The need to maintain Investors in People and work with staff to deliver a cultural change against a background of changing Government legislation.

2 RESPONDING TO THE BEST VALUE REVIEW

2.1 The Best Value Review enabled the Service to benchmark itself both with its immediate CIPFA comparators in terms of performance, cost and service output. Perhaps of greater significance was the ability to provide the opportunity to compare itself with the Planning Officers Society Excellence Model and learn from other Best Value Reviews, including those of Unitary Authorities.

2.2 The service did benefit from both member, staff and public consultation, but it must be recognised that the timescale for the review restricted the ability to develop these relationships and inputs. The lack of response from difficult to reach groups, the young and low level of response from the development/aggregates industry is particularly disappointing. The Improvement Plan must ensure that these shortcomings are addressed and that improvements are informed and implemented with more effective user input and consultation.

2.3 Action must also be taken to share the findings of the Review with its CIPFA comparators and establish a more formal benchmarking group to support continuous improvement.

2.4 The Improvement Plan has taken the opportunity to look at information received after the Review reported to Cabinet. In particular, the results of the Councils Residents Survey MORI 2002 and major announcements made by the Deputy Prime Minister regarding the Government's review of the Planning System. The Plan also takes on board further input from the Head of Spatial Planning regarding resource availability and the opportunities to develop linkages with non-land use services from both within the existing Division, as well as outside.

2.5 The Review process enabled four drivers of service development and improvement to be identified.

- **the need to provide an open and engaged service based on a strong customer focus and feedback;**
- **the need to secure upper quartile performance across the service and pursue excellence in service provision against national excellence models;**
- **the need to both influence and service strong partnership working at the local, sub-regional and regional levels; and**
- **the need to secure the effective integration of non-land use issues/services, to secure sustainable development.**