

1 Purpose

- 1.1 At the Environment & Living Scrutiny Committee on the 13 February 2018 an update was given regarding both Development Management and Planning Enforcement activities. It was resolved that the Committee would be updated with respect to the Enforcement activities. This report provides an interim update, ahead of a more fundamental review in the New Year.

2 Recommendations

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| <p>2.1 That the Committee note the content of this report.</p> <p>2.2 That the Committee identify any concerns or suggestions for service improvements that can be considered in the imminent review of the planning enforcement service identified in 1.1 above.</p> |
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3 Supporting information

- 3.1 At a previous committee it was outlined that a number of measures were to be implemented to enable improvements within the delivery of planning enforcement; namely the introduction of a new computer database system and the recruitment of a enforcement officer to replace a long-term contractor thus increasing capacity long term.
- 3.2 The implementation of the new database is not currently live but will be in the “test” phase during December and January for implementation in February 2019. The introduction of this system will assist the integration of the environmental health and planning enforcement parts of the team as their work is currently held in different systems. The use of the new database will assist with the cross-referencing of information between teams. It should however, be noted that some joint working has already been undertaken particularly around the area of Houses in Multiple Occupation.
- 3.3 It is also recognised that planning enforcement has historically focused primarily upon reactive cases (i.e. those where potential breaches are reported to us). We are reviewing at the delivery of the service in order to understand where improvements can be made, with a view to some resource for proactive enforcement.

4 Current position

- 4.1 Since June 2018 there have been a number of challenges around planning enforcement. These have included a significant turnover of staff and a sustained increase in the number of incoming cases. In particular, three of the four employed members of staff have either left AVDC or moved to new roles in the organisation. Despite undertaking two recruitment campaigns we have not been able to recruit an experienced planning enforcement officer. There is a known national shortage of planning officers.
- 4.2 Two officers from within AVDC have since joined the team and are now obtaining training and support and in time will gain their own caseload as their experience and competence increases.
- 4.3 As only the Principal Enforcement Officer has enforcement experience, we have taken action to address this issue and three experienced contractors have joined the team on a short to medium term basis. Two are focusing on the training and development of the new enforcement officers as well as

carrying a caseload, whilst the other is focused on activity to classify, progress and close historic cases.

- 4.4 There has been a 29% increase in the number of open complaints between the 1 September 2017 and 1 September 2018. This is predominantly as a consequence of the staff turnover referenced in para 4.1. Appendix 1 shows that on the 30 September 2018 there were 523 open enforcement cases. However, of these, 45 cases are resolved and will be closed (pending a final review by Principal Officer), with a further 58 cases pending a decision for retrospective planning permission. A further 70 cases are recently opened, leaving a backlog of around 350 cases.
- 4.5 The overall number of complaints received to date in 2018 is comparable to 2017, but it is anticipated that demand will continue to grow from historic levels. It is recognised that the backlog needs to be reduced and resources have now been put in place to do so. Our priority is to reduce the number of historic open cases so that the caseload is representative of the officers' actual active cases. Contractors have been set specific targets and it is anticipated that there will be a demonstrable reduction in the number of open and backlog cases by the end of November 2018.
- 4.6 A further update report will be brought to the Environment and Living Scrutiny Committee in February 2019, to update on;
- The performance of planning enforcement (including backlog cases)
 - The structure of the team, including a resource for proactive planning enforcement work.

5 Reasons for Recommendation

- 5.1 Given the above, any changes to the authority's approach to enforcement (including proactive enforcement), will be held until the new year to allow a reduction in the number of open and backlog cases, further recruitment of a Senior Officer, training of the new team members and the implementation of the new IT system.

6 Resource implications

- 6.1 There have been additional resources required in the form of contracted officers. These costs have been broadly in line with the savings from the posts which were (or remain) vacant. Additionally, much of the sustained increase in complaints is likely to be linked the increase in development activity in the Vale. It has therefore been agreed that additional planning fee income can offset the additional cost of a further planning enforcement contractor for the remainder of this financial year.

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Background Documents	Nil

Appendix 1

Table 1 – Number of complaints and cases closed in 2017 and 2018

	2017	2018 (to 30/9/18)
Complaints received	586	438
Cases closed	496	289
Notices/Injunctions	11	4

Table 2 – Number of cases open on the 1 September 2017 and 2018

	2017	2018	% change
Number of cases open on 1 Sept	406	523	+29%

Table 3 – Number of cases opened and closed during a 12 month period

	Received	Closed
Number of cases 1/9/ 2017-31/8/18	546	429
Average number of cases per month 1/9/17-31/8/18	45.5	35.75