

**Development
Control
Best Value
Review:**

Summary 2009

This document follows on from a 2001 Best Value exercise which was fully updated in July 2008. The format of this document is deliberately brief for ease of clarity and comparison. For more information, the reader is referred to the 2008 document which is available at:

[http://rds.eppingforestdc.gov.uk/Published/C00000610/M00005563/AI00016133/\\$DevControlinBVReviewReport.docA.ps.pdf?ku=30353527\\$RTW](http://rds.eppingforestdc.gov.uk/Published/C00000610/M00005563/AI00016133/$DevControlinBVReviewReport.docA.ps.pdf?ku=30353527$RTW)

The tables in this document mirror those in the earlier exercise, but include information for the last five years. For the complete time series, this document can be added to the earlier ones.

The earlier documents provided a great deal of background information which is not repeated here.

	2004-2005	2005-2006	2006-2007	2007-2008	2008-2009
<i>Planning applications received:</i>	2086	1962	2033	2302	1972
<i>Planning & enforcement appeals received:</i>	94	105	143	132	153
<i>Enforcement complaints received</i>	855	653	783	757	708 investigations

Over the last five years we have seen more volatility of total numbers received. 07/08 figures were the highest ever and last year, the figure falling was due to the economic downturn part way through 2008/09. Inclusive of application for the discharge of planning conditions, a new format introduced this year, and the total would have been 2099. Appeals received were however, the highest on record at 153. Enforcement complaints were at an average level.

The overall sense is that we have coped with a slight increase in workload given other resources later on.

Best Value Performance Indicators & National Performance Indicators

Over the last 5 years, there has been improvement in performance, but figures are just still under the top quartile target. Improvement plans are in place to make more improvement. The previous Best Value Performance Indicators have been replaced with a new suite of National Indicators. The table sets out which Best Value Indicator number refers to which new National Indicator.

Best Value Performance Indicator	Equivalent National Indicator
109	157 a, b, c
204	145

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Performance Overview

Applications

	2004/ 05	2005/ 06	2006/ 07	2007/ 08	2008/ 09
<i>Applications received</i>	2,086	1,962	2,033	2,302	1972
<i>% decided in target – BV109 returns</i>					
<i>‘major’</i>	41%	54%	67%	79%	59.38%
<i>‘minor’</i>	57%	71%	73%	78%	79.64%
<i>‘other’</i>	77%	85%	90%	89%	89.88%
<i>% decided under delegated powers</i>	86%	82%	89%	88%	85%
<i>Establishment case officers</i>	10.5	10.5	10.5	10.5	10.5

Enforcement

	2004/ 05	2005/ 06	2006/ 07	2007/ 08	2008/ 09
<i>Complaints received</i>	855	653	783	757	708
<i>Complaints resolved</i>	751	739	848	723	709
<i>Enforcement notices served</i>	33	21	18	23	22
<i>PCNs served</i>	7	32	26	45	15-20
<i>BOCNs served</i>	2	1	0	1	0
<i>Injunctions sought</i>	2	0	0	0	1
<i>Establishment officers</i>	5	5	5	5	5

Appeals

	2004/ 05	2005/ 06	2006/ 07	2007/ 08	2008-2009
<i>Planning Application Appeals received</i>	94	105	143	132	134
<i>% of appeals allowed (BV204)</i>	29%	22%	30%	29	40.3%
<i>Staff numbers</i>	<i>There are no staff solely dedicated to appeals</i>				

	2000/01	2003/04	2006/07
Overall satisfaction with the service	75%	71%	82%

Current Staffing (Dec 2009)

PDC/01	ASST DIRECTOR OF PLANNING	N. RICHARDSON	1.00
PDC/02	PRINC PLANNING OFFICER	S.SOLON	1.00
PDC/03	PRINC PLANNING OFFICER	J.SHINGLER	1.00
PDC/04	SENIOR PLANNING OFFICER	VACANT DEC 2009	1.00
PDC/05	SENIOR PLANNING OFFICER	J. CORDELL	1.00
PDC/06	SENIOR PLANNING OFFICER	K.SMITH	1.00
PDC/07	SENIOR PLANNING OFFICER	G.COURTNEY	1.00
PDC/08	PLANNING OFFICER	P. ONYIA SECONDED 2009	1.00
PDC/09	PLANNING OFFICER	D DUFFIN	1.00
PDC/10	PLANNING OFFICER	M.TOVEY	1.00
PDC/11	PLANNING OFFICER	D.BAKER	1.00
PEF/01	PRINC PLANNING OFFICER	J. GODDEN	1.00
PEF/02	SENIOR ENFORCEMENT OFFICER	C.MUNDAY	1.00
PEF/03	ENFORCEMENT OFFICER	S HART	1.00
PEF/04	ENFORCEMENT OFFICER	D.H.THOMPSON	1.00
PEF/05	ENFORCEMENT OFFICER	D ANDREW	1.00
PEF/06	COMPLIANCE OFFICER	VACANT FEB 2009	0.56
PEF/07	ADMIN ASSISTANT	T.FORECAST	1.00

17.56

4. Further Detail

a) Workloads: The 2009 Update:

6.1 *The planning application workload has continued to increase – 20.6% increase over the 2000/01 total and altogether a 59% increase over the base (1,450) used in the 2001 review. However, it can be seen that the workload was increasing in 2003/04 and then fell slightly in 2004/05 and again in 2005/06, rising again in 2006-7, before reaching a peak in 2007/08. The economic downturn saw an unsurprising fall in application submissions in 2008-09.*

6.2 *The means of measuring application performance changed in 2002/03 when the returns were split into the 3 separate categories identified in the table above. This coincided with the Government publishing targets for authorities to achieve of 'Major'– 60%, 'Minor'– 65%, and 'Other'– 80% of planning applications dealt within 8 weeks of being made valid (13 in the case of Majors). These were very challenging targets in the first instance coinciding with the significant increase in the workloads. However, by the fourth year (2005/06) two of the three government targets were being met and by the fifth year (2006/07) all three were met.*

- 6.3 However, the Council aspires to be within the top quartile of performing authorities, and since then the target levels has been set higher by the Council. This has been hard to achieve with existing resources and a Last year, and we fell short in two of the three categories: Minor- 78.06% rather than 80.39% and Other – 89.27 rather than 91.61%. The five year journey from 2002/03 to the present performance is however noteworthy, though the top quartile levels have been rising all the time.
- 6.4 The enforcement workload has also risen. Significant increases in the number of alleged breaches of control reported occurred in 2003/04 and 2004/05, falling the following year but since 2006/07, complaints have been 700+, both in terms of received and resolved. This level of workload is likely to be repeated for the current year.
- 6.5 The appeal workload has remained fairly constant since the time of the last review, with the exception of the two years of lower activity generally. Up to 2007/08, performance, though variable for reasons well known to members, had remained better than the national average (still at about 31%). However, last year, not only was there a higher number of appeals received than previous, but those allowed were also at its highest. Officers have assessed the appeal decisions, concluding that not only were the no. of appeals higher, but so were the appeals allowed against officer recommendations at committee level. The conclusion was that the Planning Inspectorate in recent years was keen to maximise the use of urban land in sustainable locations, rather than member concerns over the infrastructure in place to cope with increased housing.

	Length of Service at EFDC: April 1 2009
Officer A	10 years
Officer B	5 years
Officer C	17 years
Officer D	VACANT
Officer E	<1 year
Officer F	2 years
Officer G	4 years
Officer H	2 years
Officer I	<1 year
Officer J	3 years
Officer K	9 years
Officer L	9 years
Officer M	2.5 years
Officer N	6.5 years
Officer O	4 years
Officer P	6 years
Officer Q	VACANT

- 6.14 The following table is similar to that appearing in the 2001 Review paragraph 4.18 above, and provides an average number of applications per establishment post case officers in recent years.

	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Staff	10.5	10.5	10.5	10.5	10.5
Applications	2,086	1,962	2,033	2,302	1972
Average	199	187	194	219	188

This is against a background where the Government advises, as a result of various studies, that the targets for handling all applications cannot be

satisfactorily achieved **unless the average number of cases per case officer is in the order of 150.**

- 6.15 The experience of this authority is that the averages displayed in the above table are too high if the Governments targets are to be consistently met and far too high if the top quartile targets are to be achieved. The Panel will recall that it was in 2005/06 budget, after years of continuous rises in application numbers and of average cases per officer well over 200, that the Council provided £100,000 to spend on additional staff resources (known as the 'Hit Squad') to deal with a backlog of applications that had built up and to significantly improve the performance figures. The first member of the squad was appointed in August 2005 with the view to employing 4 members for about 9 months. However, since members came and went with regularity and it was rare that 4 people were in post at any one time, the budget lasted until late 2006 when the final member, Subash Jain, left.
- 6.16 It is difficult to define 'backlog' in development control terms, but the measure we have been using is to record the proportion of applications outstanding at the end of any given period that are already beyond their target date. The following table records the effectiveness of the team during the 'Hit Squad' period:

Quarter beginning:	Total on hand at end of month	Total already past target date	Proportion
October 2005	322	106	33%
January 2006	270	83	31%
April 2006	271	42	15%
July 2006	333	47	14%
October 2006	269	47	17%
January 2007	276	47	17%
April 2007	352	47	13%
July 2007	309	38	12%
October 2007	321	33	10%
January 2008	344	51	15%
April 2008	307	46	15%
July 2008	377	31	8%
October 2008	298	42	14%
January 2009	259	33	13%
April 2009	333	31	9%
July 2009	301	42	14%

These figures, together with the significant improvement in performance, illustrate the considerable impact the budget provision made at that time.

- 6.17 **However, this has only been possible with the further contribution to the budget of Planning Delivery Grant, which has enabled further agency and consultant resource to be bought in to further improve performance.**
- 6.18 Since the last of the Hit Squad members left the Council at the end of 2006, we have been able to secure the employment of a local, qualified, senior planner to handle a planning application caseload who had been with the authority since early summer 2006 paid for out of Planning Delivery Grant allocation, which has now finished. Since July 2009, this officer has been covering succession of job vacancies, that has helped to maintain performance. However, this staff resource costs the Council about £50,000 in 2008/09, which is more than the full cost of a senior planner on the establishment.

6.19 Even should the establishment be increased by this senior planner to 11.5 case officers, this would still represent an average caseload of over 170 cases per officer at last year's total – still significantly above the Government's recommendation and yet at a level at which Officers consider performance can be successfully managed. For 2009/10, a planning officer has been seconded to the Forward Plan section, leaving the team one post down (9.5). However, this has coincided with a fall of about 100 planning applications and a reduction in appeals compared with the 2008/09. Staff issues were a major factor in 2008/09, with Principal Planning Officers acting up to cover Assistant Director (P&C) and long term illness of Assistant Director (Development), as well as the Development Control team being a Senior Officer down until Dec 08. The reliance of staff in all posts for the year can not be under estimated if top quartile performance is to be achieved. Officers continue to strive to hit top-quartile performance and share Members disappointment that the high targets are proving difficult to achieve, but it should be recognised that not only was 2008/09 another high workload year, staff numbers were down as a result of the illness of the Assistant Director (Development) and a Senior Planner for 6 months.

5. Cost Analysis for Development Control

The 2009 Update:

The Key Information table has been updated and projected, plus adding information specifically about staff costs.

This is followed by an updated Evaluation Table. It will be noted however that the first 3 rows have been deleted since the analysis is not regarded as meaningful.

Key Information:

The cost analysis below shows only Development Control data and does not include financial information relating to Enforcement and Planning Appeals

	2005-2006	2006-2007	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010 Estimated Outturn
DC net budget £	620898	506356	598459	532331	347910
DC total expenditure for year £	1233611	1089652	1171181	1191379	911660
Expenditure on third party payments £	658285	740760	781570	738440	741880
Support Services contribution to DC £	128535	136557	126105	49905	38210
Managerial & Professional contribution to DC £	43040	50382	70260	47288	37960
Supplies &	146751	196979	287523	104433	73570

Services contribution to DC £					
DC Income	546713	535171	528999	616417	544000
Staff FTE	14.8	10	10.6	11.7	10.9
Staff costs inc Super & NI	488370	437670	462570	399320	409150
Average Staff cost inc	32997	43767	43640	34129	37537

Evaluation of Information

	2005-2006	2006-2007	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010 Estimated Outturn		
Staff costs as % of DC total cost	39	40	39	33	44	Staff costs divided by total Gross cost as %	
Staff costs per application for DC £	249	215	201	207	207	Staff costs divided by Planning Applications received	Applications rec`d based on 2008/09
% increase of DC income	44	-2	-1	17	-12	Increase or decrease in income over previous year as %	
DC income to total cost percentage	44	49	45	52	60	Income divided by Gross cost As %	
Application to income charges £	279	263	260	312	275	Total Income divided by planning applications rec`d	Applications rec`d based on 2006/07
Average gross cost of application £	629	536	509	604	462	Total Gross costs divided by planning applications received	Applications rec`d based on 2006/07

During the period prior to 2008/09 Planning Services introduced a new computer system (Northgate M3), as a result expenditure on Supplies and Services and Support Service recharges were unnaturally high and distort the statistics so that few comprehensive conclusions can be drawn. As a result, although staffing has remained at similar levels, these costs make up a smaller percentage of the total.

The percentage of income to gross cost will vary from year to year and is driven to a degree by the number and complexity of applications. The fee structure is such that the income from a particular application does not necessarily reflect the time spent on that application, however staff costs per application have remained fairly constant since 2006/07.

DEFINITIONS OF APPLICATIONS

*Major - any scheme on any site of over 1 hectare;
a residential scheme on any site over 0.5 hectares or
a residential scheme providing more than 10 dwelling units; and
a commercial scheme of over 1000 square metres floorspace.*

Minor - any other commercial development or new dwellings

Other - householder applications (extensions to houses, etc), advertisements, listed building applications, and applications for certificates of lawful development.