

Report to the Council

Committee: Cabinet **Date:** 14 February 2012
Subject: Planning and Technology
Portfolio Holder: Councillor John Philip

Recommending:

That the report of the Planning and Technology Portfolio Holder be noted

Planning

Planning Performance

Quarter 3 performance targets are on course in respect of KPI 51 (Major Planning Applications), currently at 82.76% against a target of 81%, although this is volatile and can change easily due to the low number of planning applications in this category, and KPI 54 (Appeals as a result of officer recommendations and delegated decisions), currently at 18.18% against a target of 20%.

KPI 53 (Appeals allowed – Members reversal of officer recommendations) is just exceeding the 50% target with 7 out of 16 appeals allowed and therefore 56% of appeals have been dismissed.

Forward Planning

Staffing

We have appointed a new member of staff to the Planning Officer role (Grade 6) and her start date is expected to be during March. Interviews are being held in the first two weeks of February for the temporary Information and Technical Officer and Forward Planning (Administrative) Assistant roles.

Evidence Base

The Council is currently appointing consultants to work on the Strategic Land Availability Assessment (SLAA), following the consultation on methodology carried out late last year. This SLAA will help to identify potential sites for housing, employment and retail uses over the future Local Plan period (to 2031). The tenders have been returned and interviews were carried out at the end of January. Over the coming months we will be appointing consultants to complete a Heritage Review, Carbon Reduction Strategy and an Assessment of Open Space & Recreation Facilities.

Statutory Monitoring

Regular work, including the Annual Monitoring Report, the 5 year assessment of land supply and the Town Centre Surveys, has been completed on schedule.

Local Plan

The team is drafting the Issues and Options document for the new Local Plan. Work continues on the new population and household projections from the jointly-commissioned Essex Planning Officers' Association study. Officers are continuing to work to a condensed timetable and are focussed on collating and finalising evidence. After finalising the Evidence Base, the team can move on to identify strategic options for the Local Plan.

Technology

Mobile Working Solutions

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) have recently implemented the Information at Work Mobile Briefcase application. This will allow Planning Officers, and potentially others, easily to take electronic documentation off-site in a secure manner. To compliment this system, a number of tablet devices, which are a mobile computer with a touchscreen or pen-enabled interface, are also being evaluated. Following an intensive trial period, a product from *GOOD Technology* has now been purchased and will allow staff to have secure real-time access to their EFDC Calendar and emails using their work or personal Smartphone.

Wireless Broadband

The Disaster Recovery and wireless broadband Invitation to Quote (**ITQ**) has been awarded to the Chelmsford based Buzcom. Buzcom have also been involved in the provision of wireless broadband in both the Maldon and Uttlesford areas. ICT will now progress both the Disaster Recovery and District wide broadband project and it is hoped to begin discussion with the successful supplier in the week commencing 6th February.

Website replacement.

The website replacement project is progressing well. The Website User Group has met a number of times to identify data requiring conversion. *Wordpress*, the product that will deal with the news element of the new site, has been tested and deployed successfully. The most recently updated project plan still indicates a live date during July 2012, prior to the Olympics.

Limes Centre

This project is nearing completion and all major ICT elements have been completed on schedule.