

PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION COMMITTEE	AGENDA ITEM 7
13 June 2017	PUBLIC REPORT

Cabinet Members responsible:	Councillor Hiller - Cabinet Member for Growth, Planning, Housing and Economic Development	
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REVIEW OF THE PERFORMANCE OF THE SHARED PLANNING SERVICE WITH FENLAND DISTRICT COUNCIL

RECOMMENDATIONS	
FROM : Director of Growth and Regeneration	Deadline date : May 2017
That Committee notes past performance and outcomes.	

1. PURPOSE AND REASON FOR REPORT

Under the terms of the shared service arrangement there is the requirement to periodically review its performance and operation. Such a review can be undertaken (in accordance with the constitution) by either the Growth Environment & Resources Scrutiny Committee or the Planning & Environmental Protection Committee (PEPC). Cllr Peach as Scrutiny Chairman has advised that he is content for PEPC to consider the review report. This report is therefore presented under the terms of the Council's constitution Part 3, Delegations Section 2 para 2.6.1.6.

2. TIMESCALE.

Is this a Major Policy Item/Statutory Plan?	NO	If Yes, date for relevant Cabinet Meeting	n/a
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3.0 Background

3.1 In October 2015 ,Peterborough City Council, under a Cabinet Member Decision Notice, agreed to join a Shared Planning Service arrangement with Fenland District Council. The proposal was built on the following key aims:

- To deliver efficiencies for both authorities.
- To support the ambitious growth agenda of both Councils.
- To maintain service delivery standards, and to improve them where possible and appropriate.
- To maintain individual 'sovereignty' for both Councils over planning delivery; with no perception of a 'take over' in such a sensitive service area.
- To ensure visibility to Members and customers of key staff.
- To be scalable – a trading model to deliver services to other Councils in the country that makes the partnership a 'fee earner' and treats the service as a business.
- To provide fairness of opportunities for staff in both authorities.

- To maintain individual Council Planning Committees.
- To ensure that the end users of the planning service see only an improvement in service delivery (i.e. not a reduction).

3.2 The proposal also included the following key features:

- A staff model that essentially creates the concept of a flexible resource pool, with the ability to work across both (and more) authority areas as required.
- A staff structure underpins this model that:
 - Reduces management overheads in a number of areas.
 - Increases flexible technical support in areas such as enforcement, arboriculture, ecology and conservation.
 - Provides for joint recruitment and flexible working across the two authorities, thereby being more attractive to retaining and attracting quality professional staff.
- Maintaining relevant planning staff located in both councils, with the potential for more generic functions to be located in a single place, and with flexible locations of other field based staff.
- Delivery of savings for both authorities compared to current costs, and the potential to generate further income when the model is expanded in the future to include other councils.
- Additional senior manager planning expertise to support major planning processes and issues.
- Bring in service improvements by learning from each other

3.3 The Shared Service was identified as having a target income / income generation of £175,000 for Peterborough City Council.

3.4 For democratic oversight of the partnership, it was also agreed that the respective Portfolio Holders will meet quarterly with the two Lead Officers (for FDC, the Corporate Director responsible for planning) and the Shared Head of Planning to monitor performance and service delivery, oversight of the financial and savings delivery and directing the trading opportunities of the partnership. This group is the Shared Planning Board.

3.5 The shared service formally went live on 1st January 2016. Under the terms of the shared service, the Shared Service Board has met each quarter to consider performance and key operational matters. In addition, the terms require that yearly the performance of the shared service is reported to the respective authorities.

3.6 The rest of this report sets out the key milestones, achievements and performance of the shared service arrangement and what plans are in place for the future.

4.0 Scope of the Shared Service

4.1 The shared service arrangement comprises of the following:

- Sharing a single Head of Planning between both Councils
- Sharing a Technical Support Manager between both Councils
- The ability to buy and sell services between the two Councils

4.2 In respect of the latter, the following has taken place to date:

- Fenland has sold to PCC planning policy officer time
- Peterborough has sold to Fenland: planning policy / neighbourhood planning officer time, development management officer time, technical support officer time, ecology officer time, Section 106 Management & development viability officer time.

4.3 It should be noted that each Council has their own:

- Development management teams
- Enforcement / compliance teams
- Technical support teams

4.4 Based in their respective Council offices i.e. there is no co-location and officers do not have both Fenland cases and Peterborough cases to deal with at the same time.

6.0 Development Management Performance

5.1 Speed of Validation

Table 1 - % of applications validated in 5 days

FDC			PCC		
2014	2015	2016	2014	2015	2016
73%	73%	64%	94%	83%	66%

4.2 2016/17 saw a significant decrease in performance compared to previous years. This has been as a consequence of the service areas being adversely affected by the following circumstances:

- An increase in the number of applications being received
- Staffing gaps arising as staff have moved to new positions within the Councils
- Unsuccessful recruitment at PCC
- Long term sickness at PCC
- ICT upgrades at FDC which impacted system availability

4.3 The impact of these adverse events has partly mitigated through the sharing of a flexible resource between the two authorities. However, it is the part of the service which is the most tightly resourced and the least resilient area. The nature of the job (specialised) is such that it is not at all well suited to temporary cover being supplied by supply staff.

4.4 Pre-applications

4.5 A paid for service was introduced in Fenland in April 2016 and prior to that performance in terms of promptness of responses was not monitored.

Table 2 – Speed of Response to Pre-Application Requests

	FDC	PCC
% of Pre-Applications responded to within target	73%	85%

4.6 Number of Planning Applications Submitted

4.7 Both Authorities have seen a gradual increase in the number of applications being submitted which must be seen against an increase in the types of development that can take place without the need for planning permission. This demonstrates continued economic confidence in the area. The increase in workload has impacted on staff by increasing their caseloads.

No of Applications Received	FDC	PCC
2014	1256	1064
2015	1338	1042
2016	1379	1119

4.8 Planning Fee Income

4.9 The number and nature of planning applications being submitted in Peterborough is such that there has been a significant increase in planning fee income over and above forecast. Notwithstanding this, it continues to be challenging to produce accurate forecasts as the market is generally reserved about sharing its activity plans and when they do they cannot always be relied upon.

Table 4 - Planning Fee Income from 2014 to 2016

	FDC			PCC		
	2014	2015	2016	2014	2015	2016
Planning Fee Income	£0.755m	£0.743m	£0.736	£0944m	£1.154m	£1.348m
Pre-Application Fee Income	n/a	n/a	£43.5k	£57k	£93.2k	£66.4

4.10 Fenland Council only introduced a paid for pre-application service in April 2016. To date it has been well received by applicants who welcome the certainty that the process delivers. Take up of the service has been in line with expectation and has produced welcome income stream for the Council. The fee rates for the pre-application service are the same for both Councils and are in the process of being reviewed in order to iron out a handful of anomalies. In addition, the rates will have to reflect the potential resetting of planning application.

4.11 Speed of Decision Making on Applications

4.12 Both Councils have maintained consistent performance over the last 3 years with on the whole an improved picture being evident. The Government targets for performance are being comfortably exceeded and neither authority is close to designation for weak performance.

4.13 Both authorities use extensions of time in order to be able to issue planning permissions rather than refusals/ application withdrawals and since the start of the year we have been recording the exact reasons why an extension of time is being used in order that we can report on these and make improvements to our systems and planning submissions as may be found to be necessary. When the arrangement is reviewed next year by Overview and Scrutiny we will have a comprehensive set of data to share.

	FDC			PCC		
	2014	2015	2016	2014	2015	2016
Major Applications (in 13 weeks or within eot)	89%	91%	90%	86%	96%	98%
Minor Applications(in 8 weeks or within eot)	85%	85%	90%	84%	90%	93%
Other Applications(in 8 weeks or within eot)	93%	96%	97%	92%	93%	96%

Eot = extension of time

4.14 Planning Appeals

4.15 Appeals performance has fluctuated over the last 3 years at both authorities. However, the number of appeals is modest and so consequently each appeal decision accounts for a high number of percentage points.

	FDC			PCC		
	2014	2015	2016	2014	2015	2016
% Appeals Dismissed	88%	74%	77%	70%	48%	82%
No. of allowed appeals that were committee overturns (total no. of allowed appeals in brackets)	1 (2)	0 (5)	1 (8)	2 (12)	4 (11)	0 (6)
No. of awards of costs against LPA	0	2	2	0	0	1

4.16 Planning Compliance

4.17 Both authorities have seen a significant increase in the number of cases being reported. There is a significant backlog of cases at FDC and due to recruitment difficulties, attempts to reduce this have been unsuccessful. Given the increase in workloads at

PCC, it has not been possible to redirect some additional resource towards FDC to assist.

	FDC			PCC		
	2014	2015	2016	2014	2015	2016
No. of Service Request	336	289	363	530	505	601
No. of cases closed	291	369	357	590	552	584

5.0 Budget Savings

- 5.1 As part of the shared service proposals it was a key objective for the Councils to make financial savings. The targeted savings have been successfully achieved as planned through:
- The sharing of the cost of the Head of Planning and the Technical Team Manager
 - A restructure of the service at Fenland District Council which was implemented prior to the start of the shared service.
- 5.2 From a Development Management perspective the savings / income generated in 16/17 has been £114.5k with a further income of c £36k from providing other services.

6.0 Future of the Shared Planning service

- 6.1 Over the next 12 months the Head of Planning will continue to ensure that the planning teams in both councils continue to improve and meet the performance indicators set out within in each organisation.
- 6.2 Over the last 12 months, little progress has been made on the proposed joining up of the two technical teams. Staff Committee were clear that any further proposals would come back to them for consideration, however this has been unable to be progressed as currently the technology to support a joined up arrangement is not working. Various testing and solutions have been looked at and this will continue over the next year.
- 6.3 The Shared Planning Board will also continue to look for further trading and income generation opportunities to support each councils financial challenges.
- 6.4 Finally, the recent Housing White Paper (Fixing our broken housing market) included proposals for boosting planning team capacity and capability to deliver, improving the speed and quality with which planning cases are handled, while deterring unnecessary appeals.
- 6.5 Following the white paper, the Government has followed this up offering Councils the opportunity to opt in to a 20% increase in planning fees on the proviso that the additional income is retained within the planning service in order to deliver development. Both authorities have informed Government of the wish to accept the fee increase however the announcement of the general election means that the introduction of the fee increase will not take place before the Autumn (July was the original introduction date).

7.0 Conclusion

- 7.1 The shared service has been in operation for 12 months and has operated successfully in terms of:
- Performance against key indicators
 - The delivery of targeted savings
 - The trading of services between the two authorities
 - Improving the resilience of each authority's planning teams