

Area Plans Subcommittees Cycle of Meetings

Background

1. Over the past 5 years the Government required local authorities to improve their performance in the speed of determining planning applications. They did this by setting targets, 'naming and shaming' those authorities that were 'failing' and by providing incentives in the form of additional grant to those authorities that were 'succeeding'.

2. The Government began separating the planning application performance into 3 categories and set a target for each:

Major applications (large commercial schemes and residential schemes over 10 units)60% in 13 weeks
Minor applications (smaller commercial and residential schemes)..... 65% in 8 weeks
Other applications (mostly householder applications for extensions, etc, changes of use, adverts and other minor applications) 80% in 8 weeks.

3. Five years ago (2002/03) this Council's performance was:

Major26%
Minor55%
Other78% all three below the Government's targets.

4. Last year (2006/07), the performance had improved to:

Major67%
Minor73%
Other90% all three exceeding the Government's targets.

5. However, bearing in mind the investment the Council has made in Planning in recent years and a desire to provide a first-class service to its residents, the Council's objective is to achieve top quartile performance for these three key indicators, and has thus adopted the following targets:

Major74.75%
Minor80.39%
Other91.61%

Current Performance

6. An Improvement Plan for these Indicators was adopted at the beginning of the year and for the first 6 months (April-September 2007) the performance has been:

Major80%
Minor79.1%
Other88.6%

7. Of the 1,111 planning decisions taken during this period, 964 were within the target periods and 147 exceeding target. These comprised 4 out of 20 Major applications, 41 out of 196 Minor applications and 102 out of 895 Other applications.

8. Of the 147 that exceeded the targets, 101 were applications determined by committee rather than under delegated powers.

Three-week or Four-week Cycle

9. Without altering the delegation agreement or the time available for consultation and reply and thus without any impact upon local democracy in planning decisions, assistance in improving performance can be made by holding each Area Sub Committee on a more regular basis, i.e. every 3 weeks rather than every 4 weeks as at present.

10. It can be appreciated that losing one week in the committee cycle, at its very simplest, would save one week in the time taken to determine applications.

11. An analysis of the decisions during April-September 2007 reveals that a number of applications missed their target because of the lack of any committees through April/May around the election period and members will have noted that this has been addressed with an additional meeting being arranged for next April and May for each subcommittee. However, in addition, it is noted that 1 Major application, 3 Minor applications and 5 Other applications determined by committee slipped over target by less than 7 days. These would have been in target had the committees operated on a 3-week cycle and would have resulted in performance of:

Major	85%
Minor	80.6%
Other	89.2%.

12. However, it is anticipated that an unknown, though small, number of additional applications might have met their target if the case officer were confident that a more regular meeting of the appropriate sub committee would have enabled the target to be met.