

TEWKESBURY BOROUGH COUNCIL

Report to:	Executive Committee
Date of Meeting:	17 November 2021
Subject:	Development Management Review
Report of:	Head of Development Services
Corporate Lead:	Chief Executive
Lead Member:	Lead Member for Built Environment.
Number of Appendices:	One

Executive Summary:

POS Enterprises - the operational arm of the Planning Officers' Society - was appointed by Tewkesbury Borough Council to undertake a review of its Development Management service.

The review took place between April and July 2021 and the final report was received in late September. The team which carried out the review presented its findings to the Council's Management Team and Transform Working Group in October.

This report outlines how the Council plans to respond to the findings of the report. It is focused on the delivery of a high-level action plan, which encompasses the recommendations from the final review report.

The high-level action plan is supported by a vision, principles and five detailed workstreams to ensure there is clarity in terms of what we want to deliver through this piece of work – and these have been outlined as part of this report.

Recommendation:

- 1. To ENDORSE the Council's response to the review and approve the high-level action plan attached to the report at Appendix 1.**
- 2. To APPROVE that Transform Working Group monitors delivery of the action plan.**

Reasons for Recommendation:

The review carried out by POS Enterprises was undertaken at a high-level focusing on what changes are necessary or desirable to make the development management service fully fit for purpose over the next three years. The Council's response to the review introduces five detailed workstreams, which will ensure that the review's recommendations – including improvements in performance management, customer care and the management of our processes - are embedded within the development management service.

Resource Implications:

The development management service currently has a number of vacancies and so resource is stretched. A recruitment drive is planned to fill these vacancies.

In addition, a reserve of £80,000 has been set aside for this project and this is anticipated to be directed towards a temporary Development Management Improvement Manager post to support the delivery of the improvements set out in the high-level action plan.

Further resource requirements will be outlined in the project's individual streams, which will be approved through our internal project management framework process.

Legal Implications:

None arising directly from this report.

Risk Management Implications:

Failure to address the issues arising from the review will have an impact on performance in determining planning applications and could result in a negative experience for users of the service.

Performance Management Follow-up:

Monitoring of the action plans for the five workstreams will be delivered through regular reporting to Transform Working Group.

Monitoring of the development management KPIs to be delivered through reporting via the Performance Tracker scrutinised by Overview and Scrutiny Committee on a quarterly basis.

Environmental Implications:

None arising directly from this report.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 POS Enterprises - the operational arm of the Planning Officers Society - was appointed by Tewkesbury Borough Council to undertake a review of its Development Management service. The review was commissioned by the Head of Development Services and the Development Manager, both of whom acknowledged the need for change and improvement and recognised external review as the catalyst to initiate the necessary action.

1.2 The purpose of the review was to review issues across the service, including:

- Performance.
- Structure and resources.
- Procedures and processes.
- Pre apps engagement.
- Use of extensions of time.
- Reporting to the Planning Committee and its effectiveness.
- Use of conditions and monitoring.
- Customer satisfaction.

1.3 The final report from the review team was received in September, and since then, an

officer project board has been set up to oversee the Council's response.

2.0 FINDINGS OF THE REVIEW

2.1 The review identified a number of areas which, in the opinion of the review team, should be the focus for the Council, and following consideration of the report, the review team recommended that the Council should prepare an action plan with clear priorities and timescales, in consultation with the staff.

2.2 It is important to point out that a characteristic of the review process is that there is an emphasis on the negatives as these are where the service is not performing to the levels that could be expected. This is always the case and does not indicate a failing service - more that there is scope for improvement.

2.3 The report identified that the current development management service has a number of strengths, and these were found as:

- Many well motivated and committed staff.
- General corporate support for planning.
- Availability of Uniform/Enterprise system.
- Availability of statistical/monitoring information.
- Public speaking provisions at Committee generally good.
- Informed debate at Committee.
- Lockdown systems and processes introduced promptly and working well.

2.4 In respect of areas for improvement, the review team identified these as:

- Performance against Government criteria.
- Awareness of performance issues.
- Use of Extensions of Time – need for clear guidance and control.
- Risk averse approach.
- Approach to management generally.
- Scheme of Delegation should be reviewed.
- Customer care (time taken to determine applications, delays in responses, lack of availability of officers, double/treble handling of phone calls/emails).
- Split between professional planners and support services, and role of technicians.
- Support for new starters.
- Length of Committee reports.

3.0 OUR RESPONSE

3.1 Reflecting the recommendations in the review team's final report, a cross-service project board has been created to drive change and deliver improvement in the Development Management Team.

The team is made up of officers from within the Development Management Team and – recognising the importance of the Development Management Team working alongside the Council's corporate objectives – there are also officers from teams outside of Development Management.

Sitting on the project board is:

Head of Development Services (Project sponsor).

Corporate Services Manager (Project lead).

Development Management Manager.

Planning Team Leader x 2.

Planning Transformation Manager.

Planning Transformation Officer.

Organisational and Development Manager.

Planning Administration Team Leader.

3.2 The project board has developed the following vision for the project, which is currently out for consultation with the Development Management teams:

"To create a resilient, high-performing and customer-focused planning service where the internal culture fosters positivity, innovation, mentoring and empowerment."

3.3 Our principles

The following principles have been identified as being critical to this project's success – these are the things that will run throughout our approach to improving development services and they reflect the values within our Council Plan.

- Customer focus – our development management service will be shaped around the needs of its customer and will deliver an enjoyable customer experience.
- Culture – our culture will be one that is friendly, helpful, where staff feel empowered and where high performance is expected and achieved.
- Transformation – wherever possible we will review our business processes to ensure they are digital by default, streamlined and improve the customer experience.

3.4 Our priorities:

The priorities below are a reflection of the priorities identified by the review team, and each of these has been picked up as part of the project board's high level action plan.

1. Improve our processes by introducing and implementing performance management and monitoring including setting clear ambitious but achievable targets over a three-year-period.
2. Set up a cross-cutting team to review how the service treats the customer in all aspects of its work and prepare an action plan for improvement.
3. Change the emphasis of the role of the DM manager/team leaders away from detailed intervention in individual applications to managing the application process – allowing planners to be empowered to make recommendations without constantly referring them to managers.
4. Institute a review of the Planning Committee structure to ensure it is efficient and effective.
5. Review the Scheme of Delegation to reduce the number of minor planning application being considered by the Planning Committee.
6. The empowerment of our staff.
7. To continue to challenge and question ourselves to ensure continuous improvement.

4.0 **HIGH LEVEL ACTION PLAN**

4.1 In line with the review team's overarching recommendation to develop a plan with timescales, the project board has developed a high-level action plan (found at Appendix 1) to respond to the findings of the review. Actions within the plan have been given an indicative timescale of short-term (up to six months), medium-term (up to 12 months) and long-term (up to three years).

4.2 Given the complexity and number of actions, the action plan has been developed as a programme of works and split it into the following streams:

- Corporate ambition – setting the foundations of the preferred direction for our Development Management service
- Performance management - ensuring our performance management is meaningful, with effective monitoring and management put in place.
- Processes and transformation - reviewing the way we work across the service to ensure a customer focus and looking to adopt a 'digital by default' approach to processes.
- Planning Committee – reviewing all aspects of the Planning Committee, including the Scheme of Delegation and training.
- People and culture – reviewing the organisation of the service, the empowerment of staff and the culture of the teams.

5.0 **MONITORING PROGRESS OF ACTION PLAN**

5.1 Each stream of the action plan will have a project lead, who sits within the overall project team. Members of the development management teams, as well as teams outside of the service, will be encouraged to get involved in projects within this review.

5.2 Detailed project plans for each stream - with dates, responsible officers and detail for each action - will be established. Each of these will be reported to Programme Board to ensure they receive corporate oversight, challenge and input from cross-Council services.

5.3 Given the review's transformational nature, it is proposed through this report that each stream's project plan is also reported to Transform Working Group. This will ensure the review's actions have Member input and examination.

6.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

6.1 None.

7.0 CONSULTATION

7.1 The proposed response approach described in this report was presented to the Lead Member and Transform Working Group in October.

The proposed vision for the response has been consulted on with members of the Development Management teams between September and November.

8.0 RELEVANT COUNCIL POLICIES/STRATEGIES

8.1 Council Plan 2020 to 2024.

Customer Care Strategy.

9.0 RELEVANT GOVERNMENT POLICIES

9.1 National Planning Policy Framework.

10.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (Human/Property)

10.1 The resources identified to date to oversee and implement the high-level action plan are set out in Paragraph 3.1 of the report. It is acknowledged that additional resources will be required to support the implementation of the action plan and monies have been set aside to support this.

11.0 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS (Social/Community Safety/Cultural/ Economic/ Environment)

11.1 The Council Plan seeks to ensure economic, social and environmental sustainability.

12.0 IMPACT UPON (Value For Money/Equalities/E-Government/Human Rights/Health And Safety)

12.1 Our response to the review seeks to ensure value for money and equitable service provision.

13.0 RELATED DECISIONS AND ANY OTHER RELEVANT FACTS

13.1 Council Plan (2020-2024)- approved by Council 28 January 2020.

Background Papers: None.

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Appendices: 1. High level action plan.