

2. Planning Applications Audit Report Executive Summary

Audit Objective

The overall objective of this audit was to try and help determine the causes for the drop in performance regarding speed of determining planning applications and to help find solutions to make improvements. In addition the adequacy and effectiveness of the system internal controls procedures designed to manage and mitigate financial and non-financial risks relating to the processing of planning applications was reviewed.

Assurance Opinion

Satisfactory Assurance

Whilst there is a basically sound system of internal control there are weaknesses which put some of the objectives at risk or there is evidence that the level of non-compliance with some of the controls may put some of the objectives at risk.

Number of actions

Priority	Number
High	0
Medium	5
Low/Advisory	8
Total	13

Audit Approach and Scope

The scope of the audit included a review of the following:

- testing of key controls as shown below (using the Planning Advisory Service Management Challenge Toolkits to assist in this)
- checking a sample of minor planning applications ('pending consideration' and with an application date greater than 1 January 2023) and major applications (decisions made in the current assessment period 01/10/21-30/09/23) to ensure that the correct processes were being followed.

(Note: During the course of the audit I was advised that the Planning Advisory Service (PAS) were producing a development management review report (issued 4 August 2023). As this audit had already commenced, as agreed with the Service Lead Planning, the PAS report has not been taken into account when determining my findings.)

Key controls tested

Assessment

Actions Raised

Performance Management		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulties in obtaining adequate performance monitoring reports from Uniform • Extensions of time not agreed with developers and cases found where whilst an extension of time had been obtained there was inadequate evidence held on Uniform
Workload Management		
Processes, ICT and administration		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of a dedicated admin team to process, validate and publicise applications
Political Leadership		
Pre-applications		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of a structured chargeable pre-application service
Receipt and validation		
Allocation and consultation		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delays in carrying out consultation process after applications have been validated
Considering an application		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compliance with pre-commencement conditions is not regularly monitored

Summary and next steps

There appear to be numerous factors contributing towards the drop in speed of determining planning applications, including insufficient resources, the lack of chargeable pre-application service and delays in starting the publicity and consultation process. It is pleasing to note that since the audit, it was agreed at Executive (28 November 2023) to give delegated authority to the Director of City Development in consultation with the relevant Portfolio Holder to draft pre-application charges for major applications before publication for consultation. In addition, the Service Lead - City Development is currently in the process of preparing a business case for the appointment of a Business Manager.

This is a final report of the audit findings and incorporates the remedial action agreed with the Assistant Service Leads (Planning and City Development (Major Projects) and the Service Lead – City Development. Remedial action has been agreed with management for all the medium risk findings.