

Planning Reimagined

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Purpose of the Report

1. The purpose of the report is to give an update on the work carried out in relation to the Planning Reimagined Action Plan (appendix A)

Forward Plan

2. This report appeared on the District Executive Forward Plan with an anticipated Committee date of March 2022

Public Interest

3. The report sets out progress made on the Planning Reimagined Action Plan developed through a series of workshops with cross-party members. The plan is in place to improve the planning service.

Recommendations

4. The District Executive are asked to note the content of the report, and progress made by the service.

Background

5. To support improvements to the Planning Service across the district a cross party Members working group (Planning Reimagined) was put in place.
6. The aim of the Planning Reimagined Group was to review the entire end-to-end planning process, including current working practices, and to produce an action plan to achieve the following outcomes:
 - Deliver the aims and objectives of the Council Plan and the Local Plan
 - Deliver good outcomes for our communities
 - Speed and efficiency that meets Government targets without relying on Extensions of Time
 - Delivers all the above with the resources allocated to the service
 - Achieve good customer service and establish a well-respected service.



South Somerset District Council

7. After the initial series of workshops, an action plan was produced and shared with the District Executive in December 2020. We then provided an update on progress in July 2021.

Impact of changes.

8. We have seen improvements to the service across a number of areas:-
 - At the start of the financial year, the average length of time to validate an application was 36 days, over the last two quarters the average is 8.5 days.
 - Enforcement- at the end of 2020 there were 522 open cases, this has been reduced to 361 cases.
 - There has been a 100% increase over the last year on the number of enforcement notices served compared to 2020/21.
9. Statistics prepared by the South West Development Management Group indicate that:-
 - For the 24 months to September 2021, South Somerset District Council were 6/21 authorities in terms of speed of decision-making.
 - 90% of decisions were within the 8/13 week target or agreed extension of time.
10. All of these improvements were achieved despite the incredibly challenging time for the planning service with a number of issues arising beyond the Councils control. Phosphate mitigation has affected the ability of the team to determine planning applications. We have 290 applications for housing & visitor / holiday accommodation and 3,900 dwellings held up within the system due to phosphates. We will be bringing a separate paper to District Executive on phosphates to update Members.
11. During this time, we have also seen a large increase in enforcement cases; up to four times the number, we have seen in previous years. We have also seen a 22% increase in planning applications.

Action Plan

12. All actions (appendix A) on the plan are complete apart from the task under Conservation-Review policy to allow buildings to be improved sympathetically to meet modern needs, whilst engaging with conservation groups.
13. We have requested additional resource to support the action as part of the budget setting for 2022/23.

Conclusion

14. The work we have completed over the last 18 months has put us in a positive position as we move forward. Over the next year, we will be working with the other Local Planning Authorities in Somerset within the context of Local Government Reform, taking best practice from across the County to develop an excellent service.

Financial Implications

15. None report for information only

Legal implications (if any) and details of Statutory Powers

16. None report for information only.

Risk Matrix

17. Report for information only

Council Plan Implications

18. Council Plan 2020 – 2024

Places where we live:-

Ensure development, which is sustainable, where people want to live and communities can thrive

Enable sufficient housing in appropriate places to meet community needs

Maximised the number of affordable homes including providing more affordable homes to support rural economies and communities

Protecting Core Services

Delivering a high quality, effective and timely service to our customers and communities

Carbon Emissions and Climate Change Implications

19. None report for information only

Equality and Diversity Implications

<i>An Equality Impact Relevance Check Form has been completed in respect of the Proposal?</i>	Yes
<i>The Impact Relevance Check indicated that a full EIA was required?</i>	No
<i>If an EIA was not required please attach the Impact Relevance Check Form as an Appendix to this report and provide a brief summary of its findings in the comments box below.</i>	
<i>If an EIA was required please attach the completed EIA form as an Appendix to this report and provide a brief summary of the result of your Equality Impact Assessment in the comment box below.</i>	
Additional Comments	

Privacy Impact Assessment

20. None report is for information only

Background Papers

- Planning Reimagined Dec 2020 District Executive
- Planning Reimagined Update July 2021 District Executive