



# **PLANNING A BETTER FUTURE**

## **A STRATEGIC CHANGE PROGRAMME FOR PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT SERVICES IN LEEDS**

### **FINAL REPORT**

#### **DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT**

**MAY 2006**

**PLANNING A BETTER FUTURE : FINAL REPORT**

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DEVELOPMENT SERVICES IN LEEDS**

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## **PLANNING A BETTER FUTURE : FINAL REPORT**

### **A STRATEGIC CHANGE PROGRAMME FOR PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT SERVICES IN LEEDS**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

##### **Background and introductory comments**

In August 2005, the Director of Development and the Chief Planning and Development Officer determined that a Strategic Review of Planning and Development Services was required. The Executive Member for Development and the Departmental Management Team concurred with that view. The focus of the Review is on services that deal with all development in Leeds, from initial enquiries through planning applications, appeals and enforcement. However, connections are made with the strategically linked policy, plan making, implementation and policy monitoring functions of Planning and Economic Policy, and with the contributions of the Sustainable Development Unit.

The Project Plan for the review recognised that since the Council's "Closer Working : Better Services" restructuring, we have recorded many achievements. If we were to take the government's Best Value Performance Indicators as the sole measure, we are one of the most improved planning services in the country; a remarkable achievement since we are also, arguably, the biggest and busiest.

However, when we look behind these headline indicators, we know we have issues and problems for which we do not yet have wholly effective solutions. We are not alone in that of course; there is a national context in which we work. We need to make changes because we are unable to sustain and build on the improvements we have achieved under current circumstances. We know that our staff are under too much pressure in terms of volume of work. We know that some of our key stakeholders and customers are dissatisfied with our service standards. We have plans for improvements but we have not found the capacity to introduce them quickly enough.

The time is right to reflect on how much we have achieved and to look forward to the complex challenges we face. We should take stock of the impact of the 2003 restructuring, and the new opportunities we have as a result of the investment we have made in people and technology. The purpose of this change programme is to deliver significant and sustainable improvement across the range of our planning services.

This report presents the conclusions of the review phase of the strategic change programme. It recommends courses of action that we should follow and assesses the resources we will require to deliver high quality outcomes and customer services.

**Ian Andrews**

**Chief Planning and Development Officer**

**May 2006**

## **PART A : THE PLANNING SYSTEM – EXPECTATIONS & CAPACITY**

Since the agreement of priorities for the change programme by the Project Board, the Audit Commission have published their report “**The planning system – Matching expectations and capacity**” (February 2006). The Audit Commission report is based on studies of many of the issues covered by this review. Extracts from and the key findings of the Audit Commission report are set out below.

*This report aims to help councils and others involved in the planning system address the issue of capacity in planning departments. It seeks to*

- assess current expectations of the planning system;*
- evaluate the extent to which the government's expectations have been communicated to stakeholders; and*
- identify how councils can increase capacity.*

*The government has put planning at the centre of its vision to create sustainable communities. It has introduced wide-ranging reforms, designed to speed up the system and recast planning as a strategic, proactive force. These reforms are taking place at a time when planners are the second most difficult post to recruit to in local government. This places a strain on a system charged with responding to increasing user and government expectations and dealing with nearly 700,000 planning applications each year.*

*There are five main elements to the government's policy objectives for planning:*

- to support housing growth in the areas identified for such growth;*
- to support regeneration/market renewal in other areas;*
- to ensure that all development is socially, economically and environmentally sustainable;*
- to move from the periphery to the centre of councils' activity; and*
- to deliver change quickly.*

### **Key findings**

- a) The government's objectives for the planning system are clear and consistent and have been well communicated to stakeholders. However, not all stakeholders agree with the agenda and this poses a risk to delivery, particularly in relation to new housing.*
- b) The government's focus on speed, particularly in relation to major planning applications, is having negative effects on the quality of services in some councils.*
- c) There is a shortage of experienced planners affecting councils' ability to provide planning services, but the private sector can provide comprehensive services under the direction of the planning authority.*

## **PART B : WHY DO WE NEED TO CHANGE?**

The national context for this review is the government's reform of the planning system, which is required to play a positive and effective role in achieving sustainable development, sustainable communities and better public services. This requires a high quality planning service, which is fast and effective, and which delivers certainty and high quality outcomes to address the needs of communities and business.

The regional context is the role of Leeds as the regional capital and the emerging Regional Spatial Strategy. Reforms to the planning system require close integration between building the evidence base, plan making, delivery and monitoring.

Locally, the context is the continual growth and dynamic change of the city, and the need to ensure that growth and regeneration is sustainable and delivers high standards of design and implementation. At the service level, the following factors contribute to the need for strategic review and change.

1. Feedback from business and commerce that highlights concerns about –
  - ❑ A lack of consistency in terms of advice and guidance, and implementation of certain activities such as planning obligations
  - ❑ Insufficient communication with agents throughout the planning process
  - ❑ A desire for elected members to be involved earlier in the process, particularly in large complex schemes
  - ❑ Frustration about the operation of Plans Panels, deferrals, and the extent to which debate at Panels focusses on the material planning issues
  - ❑ A desire for greater use of ICT, both in the process and in communicating with agents and consultants
2. Feedback from Elected Members and communities that indicates concerns about -
  - ❑ Consultation and engagement processes
  - ❑ Members are not kept informed sufficiently on the progress of applications etc.
  - ❑ Services are not sufficiently responsive to enquiries from Members or the public
  - ❑ The quality of some of the decisions that officers are making
3. Feedback from staff that indicates –
  - ❑ People do not feel they have enough time to do a good job and that they are given unreasonable workloads or deadlines
  - ❑ There is insufficient administrative and clerical support etc.
  - ❑ People feel they have poor working conditions, eg noise etc
  - ❑ There is insufficient consultation about changes & decisions that affect them
  - ❑ Concerns about a lack of career development opportunities and the effectiveness of the employee review and development process
  - ❑ Some people experience poor problem solving support from their managers and poor communication with their managers. Team leaders have concerns that they can spend insufficient 1:1 time with their staff.
  - ❑ Some people feel there is a lack of positive feedback about and acknowledgement of their work

4. One of the key reasons for these difficulties is the national shortage of people with the skills that we need, as a result of which we cannot currently recruit and retain sufficient highly skilled and competent people to deliver our aims.
5. We have new opportunities as a result of our investment in new Information and Communication Technology. Our new core computer system was implemented successfully in February 2006 and will be developed over the coming months as key modules such as public access are added and process improvements are introduced. This process is inevitably disruptive but is an essential part of building our capacity to achieve real improvements in the range and quality of our services.
6. The need to achieve year on year efficiencies, referred to as the Gershon regime, whilst ensuring that the service has access to sufficient resources to meet expectations.
7. The need to ensure that key planning performance indicators are achieved, in support of the City Council's overall Comprehensive Performance Assessment, in ways which are consistent with the broader needs of investors, developers and communities.
8. The planning service has become very target driven in recent years, for example, through the Government's drive to increase the speed of decisions, supported by Planning Delivery Grant incentives and Standards penalties, and through service related targets such as electronic delivery. Increased focus on such targets can mean that our focus on quality outcomes can suffer. We need to ensure that all our disparate aims can be achieved at the same time.
9. Reforms to the planning system require close integration between building the evidence base, plan making, delivery and monitoring.

In order to address these issues, we need a clear, shared vision and we need to achieve a number of related aims through the current strategic review and change programme.

**PART C : HOW ARE WE PERFORMING NOW?**

**Strategic and Corporate Aims**

Planning and Development Services work effectively in support of the Council’s Corporate aims and in meeting specific targets (though some targets are at high risk). The services support the delivery of major initiatives including the schools building programme, health and social facilities through the LIFT and other major funding mechanisms, as well as the Council’s priority regeneration initiatives such as Holbeck Urban Village, East Leeds, Lower Aire Valley etc.

At the same time, the service is effective in supporting the maximisation of the Council’s land and property assets, providing planning analysis and guidance at all key stages, and in supporting the Council’s disposals programme assisting with guidance and technical assessments of bids and tenders.

However, resource pressures are increasingly limiting our ability to provide the necessary dedicated inputs to achieve the invariably tight timescales and standards that apply to major funded programmes. The difficulties in identifying dedicated resources for an increasing number of large scale and complex programmes are now acute.

**Best Value Performance Indicators**

The following summary table shows performance against Best Value Performance Indicators for the previous three years.

<b>BEST VALUE PERFORMANCE INDICATORS</b>	<b>2002/2003</b>	<b>2003/2004</b>	<b>2004/2005</b>	<b>2005/2006</b>	<b>BV PI target</b>	<b>Metro Top Quartile</b>	<b>National Top Quartile</b>
<b>BV 106</b> Percentage of homes built on previously developed land	86%	89%	93%	96.1%	90%	92%	91.7%
<b>BV109a</b> Major industrial and commercial planning applications decided within 13 weeks	48%	65%	60.6%	53.3%	60%	66%	55%
<b>BV109b</b> Minor industrial and commercial planning applications decided within 8 weeks	58%	75%	65.3%	70.7%	65%	66%	63.7%
<b>BV109c</b> Other planning applications decided within 8 weeks	60%	84%	80.5%	81%	80%	84%	80.5%
<b>BV 204</b> Percent of appeals allowed against the Council’s decision to refuse planning permission	New 04/5	New 04/5	39%	24%	34%	N/A	N/A
<b>BV 205</b> Quality of the Planning Service against as measured by a service checklist	New 04/5	New 04/5	67%	72%	94%	N/A	N/A

The table shows that four of these six Best Value targets in were met in 2005/06. The exceptions are :

**Percentage of Major industrial and commercial planning applications decided within 13 weeks**, where the reasons for the fall off in performance are complex. Whilst resources to deal with these applications are a major concern, and the upgrade of our computer system has had an effect, the main issue here is the tension between speed

and the need to ensure that the best outcomes for Leeds are negotiated and achieved. Clearly, there is also an important tension between speed and increased community engagement on these applications, many of which have the potential to transform the area or community within which they are situated, have impacts well beyond their site boundaries. They are vehicles for the delivery of many of the City Council's aspirations and objectives in regard to regeneration and the quality of the built environment.

For some years we have argued, in common with other core cities, that the 13 week target is unrealistic, inappropriate and potentially damaging to the fundamental aim of achieving sustainable development and communities. The CBI (December 2005) and the Audit Commission (February 2006) have also reached the conclusion that this is an inappropriate indicator of performance, recommending that the Government amend the performance indicator relating to processing major applications so that it measures compliance with planning delivery agreements rather than monitoring performance against the 13-week target. The Planning Advisory Service is undertaking a pilot study on planning delivery agreements, and Leeds is working with the Planning Advisory Service as part of that pilot.

In the interim, we need to deal with the reality that the 13 week target is a rules based indicator for the Council's Comprehensive Performance Assessment and a key determinant of the amount of Planning Delivery Grant in the ODPM's allocation criteria. Therefore, we have no realistic option but to maintain the indicator at the present time. It should also be noted that one of the Government's thresholds for "Standards Authorities" may be applied at 60% of major applications within 13 weeks in 2006/07. The government may intervene where "Standards Authorities" status is declared, and this has occurred in the case of some planning authorities, including some core cities.

BV205 is a complex indicator measuring **Quality of the Planning Service**. In general terms, the key to achieving our target is our programme to update our on-line services and service enhancements referred to elsewhere in this review.

### **Significant shortfalls against other existing targets**

The Best Value Indicators measure relatively few aspects of our service levels and there are a number of important service targets that we are unable to meet at present, as a result of the resource issues that this review seeks to address and the priority given to meeting "speed" indicator targets (see above). The following are some of the more important areas where we do not achieve the service levels we aspire to;

- Responses to pre-application enquiries
- Responses to correspondence, both traditional and electronic channels
- Responses to Ombudsman enquiries, which are not dealt with quickly
- Responses to telephone calls, in terms of speed or reliability of callback

This report recommends ways in which we could address these issues. One of the key reasons for service shortfalls is that we are striving to meet all service demands at the same time when we do not have the capacity to meet all service demands to a satisfactory level. We are not always clear enough about our priorities.



## **PART D : VISION AND PRIORITIES FOR CHANGE**

### **Process**

Since September 2005, the review process has sought to consider the current position and possible futures in an inclusive way. A project team was established to take forward the review and the issues have been considered and discussed with representative groups specifically established for that purpose. These include a Project Board, a Board of senior elected members, a staff forum open to all, including trade union representatives, and a group of experienced private sector professionals representing the Leeds Chamber Property Forum.

In addition, consultation has been undertaken on the priorities we need to address and on the future vision that we are working towards.

### **The VISION for Planning Services in Leeds is that they will:**

- ❑ **play a positive and effective role in achieving sustainable development and a better quality of life for all**
- ❑ **through working with others, be seen as a means of delivering sustainable communities**
- ❑ **deliver high quality environments, development and outcomes to help achieve the Vision for Leeds**
- ❑ **deliver efficient and accessible public services that are of high quality and which represent excellent value for money.**

The review process has considered the current position and possible futures. Opportunities have been taken to gather feedback and ideas, and the latest thinking in the national context has been drawn upon. Nine key priorities that encapsulate the subject areas and purposes of the change programme have been identified. In no particular order, these priorities are set out below:

### **Key Priorities**

1. Achieving improved “one team” working, including consideration of whether further organisational changes need to be made to achieve “one team” aims.
2. Working with Elected Members to ensure that Plans Panel processes and decisions are consistent across the city and over time.
3. Addressing staff recruitment, retention and development issues to ensure that we have access to the skills and resources we need, addressing under-capacity at professional and managerial levels critical to organisational performance & development.
4. Assessing the potential for appropriate, flexible use of private sector resources to augment our capacity and investigating the potential for a strategic alliance with a

private sector organisation to augment capacity, offer flexibility, and added value over time.

5. Reviewing decision making processes and associated communication to ensure that they are efficient and consistent. Processes need to be equitable and transparent. The reasons for decisions taken need to be clearly stated.
6. Continuing to develop effective strategies for Information and Communication Technology to help deliver services, performance management and increased customer choice including “self–service” channels. Effective process improvements must ensure that the benefits of this investment are maximised.
7. Seeking consensus on a clear system of service priorities to maintain focus on our main priorities and to tailor our activities to available resources and capacity.
8. Reviewing information sources and channels to ensure that they are comprehensive, up-to-date and provided in clear and accessible forms using plain language.
9. Developing new approaches to ensure that all users of the service are able to access the service in ways geared to customer needs, that quick responses are provided and that there is a general feeling of ‘welcome’.

These priority issues can be further distilled into **five Improvement Themes** that encapsulate the changes on which we need to focus in order to achieve sustainable service improvements. The **five Improvement Themes** are described in the following section of this report.

## **PART E : IMPROVEMENT THEMES**

The action that needs to be taken as a result of this Strategic Review comprises, firstly, a number of relatively small steps that can be taken within existing resources and improvement plans, and, secondly, a number of larger scale and more significant actions that need new or reallocated resources and/or effective management as a change project.

In the former case, the relatively small improvement steps are already being taken and/or programmed in existing service improvement activities. They are not referred to in detail in this report. It is the second category, the more significant actions, that are referred to in this and subsequent sections of the report.

To underpin these improvement actions we need to continue to change and develop our culture to emphasise collective ownership of priorities and of issues, and to emphasise the delivery of solutions. Further comment is made in the conclusions to this report.

### **Five Improvement Themes**

The projects or activities (referred to as workstreams) that form the major part of the service improvements arising from the Review can be grouped together within five themes, each distinct but inter-related. These themes are :

- 1. CAPACITY BUILDING AND WORKING WITH THE PRIVATE SECTOR**
- 2. REALISING A DEFINITIVE OFFICER VIEW**
- 3. DEVELOPMENT OF AND SUPPORT FOR PLANS PANELS**
- 4. INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY**
- 5. IMPROVED CUSTOMER SERVICES**

Each is referred to in turn, below, where the main workstreams are shown and the high level outcomes sought are described, the introductory tables are supported by a summary analysis of the background. Detailed statistics are not included in the interests of brevity and clarity.

## **IMPROVEMENT THEME 1 : CAPACITY BUILDING & WORKING WITH THE PRIVATE SECTOR**

### **Planned Outcomes –**

- **A larger resource base at the critical Principal Planner level to improve performance and outcomes on major planning applications and to help guide and develop the performance and skills of less experienced staff.**
- **Tasks that can be performed by others removed from the workload of scarce planning resources to increase the time available for productive work on proposed and active developments.**
- **Increased capacity for planning enforcement to help achieve improved service levels.**
- **Effective workforce planning and development to secure the future availability of required skills and to realise the full potential of our people.**
- **Clear priorities and performance review to secure the efficient and effective use of available resources.**
- **A value for money alliance with a private sector partners to provide greater and flexible capacity to deliver planning services.**

- 
- 1.1 Enable planning support and enquiry centre staff to deal with a greater proportion of enquiries and customer relationships by developing their roles and skills.
- 
- 1.2 Achieve a structured and pooled approach to skills development of support and customer service staff to deliver operational flexibility and enhanced career paths.
- 
- 1.3 Increase the number of staff at Principal Planner level.
- 
- 1.4 Increase the number of senior staff in Compliance Services to support the new Enforcement Policy and integrate operations with Planning Services more closely.
- 
- 1.5 Leadership of focussed cultural change at senior and middle management levels is fundamental to the effectiveness of this review. Some adjustment to management roles and responsibilities will help achieve that.
- 
- 1.6 Improve longer term workforce planning and development to secure the future availability of required skills and to realise the full potential of our people.
- 
- 1.7 Determine the scope and costs of a strategic alliance with a private sector partner to provide flexible access to skills and resources.
- 
- 1.8 Maintain clarity about priorities in terms of objectives and services, and monitor the extent to which resource inputs deliver desired outcomes.
- 
- 1.9 Improve the range, quality and accessibility of Self Service channels including internet, intranet and intelligent enquiry systems, in order to release staff time to deliver other priority services.
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### **Commentary**

#### **A national shortage of planners**

Planners are in short supply. Evidence consistently points to a lack of planners available to support the government's policy objectives. According to the Employers' Organisation's latest survey for 2005, 66 per cent of councils are now experiencing difficulty recruiting planners and 48 per cent are having problems with retention.

In Leeds, staff recruitment and retention is a continual problem in the current employment market and we need to take steps to ensure that we have access to the skills and resources we need. At the same time, we need to achieve flexibility to reflect activity levels that change over time. Currently, we do not have sufficient resources to meet all the demands on the service.

### **The shortage of skilled and experienced planners in Leeds**

The critical resource deficit concerns the more senior and experienced planning officers. Options for flexible resourcing, referred to below, would assist but not offer a complete solution to our capacity needs, since this level of planning officer is key to the development of our less experienced staff and to the management of key processes and strategically important projects.

Resource levels within the planning service have been increased in recent years in response to very substantial increases in activity and workload, although staffing levels have still not matched workload levels. Activity levels have remained high, and a reasonable assumption is that workload for 2006 will match 2005, with a further projected increase for major applications.

A basic guideline exists for assessing the number of “case officers” ( officers who have prime responsibility for dealing with planning applications). This is derived from ODPM sponsored studies of standards authorities and the guideline is repeated in advice issued on improvement strategies for planning authorities.

This guidance suggests an allowance of 1.46 case officer days per “average” planning application comprising application assessment, site visit, negotiations, liaison with consultees, neighbour responses, assessing any revisions, report writing and decision check. On this basis a case officer could deal with 150 applications per year **BUT** no allowance is made for other duties such as pre application enquiries, post application changes, appeals, general correspondence and enquiries, public meetings, training etc. This approach would suggest a need for an additional 5 case officers.

However, a more sophisticated examination of the issues and workload is required to understand the resource/ demand equation, the Leeds context and the “experience gap” that continues to develop as we struggle to recruit and retain experienced and skilled planners. Detailed calculations show that our current resource base is seriously deficient at the senior end of the spectrum where it is calculated that four extra experienced and highly skilled officers are required at current activity levels.

### **Staff retention**

We have useful information on the reasons people leave the Council’s employment from exit interviews and a survey of ex staff who have moved to other jobs. We also have available comprehensive information on staff concerns from the Staff Survey and the 2005 Work / Life survey. Over the past two to three years, we have tended to lose planners to the private sector.

It is fundamentally important to address capacity issues in ways that will also address known management issues, staff support, coaching and career development

opportunities. The following outline changes seek to achieve that. Detailed proposals are being developed for consultation.

### **Developing our support staff and Customer Services Officers**

In addition to complex planning work, we deal with very large volumes of enquiries and correspondence every year. As the proportion of enquiries by email increases, and emails are often sent to multiple recipients, the number of contacts is difficult to quantify but is estimated to exceed 200,000 per annum when all media are considered.

Much of this does not need to be dealt with by experienced planners and we intend to develop further the role and ability of planning support staff and our Customer Services Officers to deal with a greater proportion of this work. A similar approach needs to be taken to the ways in which we deal with any service failures and/ or complaints, where we need to improve our effectiveness.

At the same time, the new Information and Communication Technology referred to below will provide opportunities to increase substantially the amount and sophistication of information we are able to provide through “self – service” web based channels. We need to provide for this by making adjustments to our planning support establishment, its roles and skill requirements. In so doing, we must ensure that Area Planning Managers and other key posts are well supported by effective administrative and customer services support arrangements.

In the interests of flexibility and the robustness of the resource base we intend to emphasise broad and transferable skills training across planning services and enquiry centre functions to develop a larger pool of well trained support staff and improved career opportunities to improve staff retention and development.

In addressing measures to improve customer services, we need to provide greater stability in the Development Enquiry Centre. Whilst the movement of staff to Planning Assistant posts is to be encouraged, it must be recognised that when combined with significant staff turnover for other reasons, the quality of customer service at this vital “front end” of our activities is likely to suffer. A more robust pool of people able to provide these front end services, combined with better career development opportunities needs to be achieved.

### **Area Planning Managers and Principal Planning Officers**

These are key posts within the organisation, responsible for implementing policy across a substantial area of the City, for coaching, guiding and developing staff, and for managing performance on a day to day basis, including the quality of decisions and outcomes. It is important to increase the number of staff at Principal Planner level. This may require changes to the current recruitment package since demand in the public and private sectors for skilled and experienced planning officers exceeds supply.

### **Planning Enforcement**

Progress has been made on strengthening the planning enforcement service, and a new policy and operational framework has been developed. Further changes are now planned to consolidate and accelerate the progress made, and to integrate the service

more closely with the planning application functions of Planning Services. We have experienced a period of rapid staff turnover in recent months, and that instability needs to be resolved, building skill and resource levels to meet service needs. It is proposed to increase the number of principal compliance officers by one to help accelerate improvement.

### **High level Organisational and Management**

There are a number of high level issues, in regard to how various parts of the Development Department are organised and inter-relate, that are directly relevant to the desired outcomes of this Strategic Review.

In the Closer Working : Better Services restructuring, the arrangements for senior management have left a substantial capacity issue in Planning and Development Services. Uniquely, within the senior management structure, substantial responsibilities and powers are delegated directly to the Chief Officer and are not available to the Director. These are the delegated powers in regard to planning applications and similar development management mechanisms that would create a potential conflict of interest for the Director of Development, having regard to the Director's responsibilities for the Council's property portfolio, asset management, etc.

The delegation arrangements have worked well in terms of avoiding conflicts of interest whilst achieving closer working. However, in the absence of the Chief Officer, they need to be covered more robustly. There is an important and insufficiently met demand for the high level intervention to resolve issues in regard to key development schemes or corporate challenges. Capacity for senior management intervention and influence needs to increase to secure higher levels of developer, community and member confidence, and to champion high quality outcomes in key schemes in the city.

Leadership of focussed cultural change at senior and middle management levels is fundamental to the effectiveness of this review. Some adjustment to management roles and responsibilities will help achieve that.

### **Workforce Planning and Development**

We need more sophisticated approaches to our workforce planning and development to secure the future availability of required skills and resources and to realise the full potential of existing staff.

Whilst progress has been made since the corporate Workforce Development Strategy was introduced in March 2005, that progress needs to be accelerated and properly resourced if it is to be effective. It is intended to achieve that acceleration, in line with the corporate strategy, by implementing a robust and effective approach that measures existing skills, predicts future skill requirements, and drives staff development activities to make appropriate provision for future needs.

### **Working with the Private Sector**

Services need to use a range of innovative solutions to secure adequate resources and sufficient competent staff. There are several examples of this at present, including planners funded by Area Committees for local area work outside the "standard" service,

and funding for “backfill” planners by developers or large scale City Council driven development programmes, such as PFI packages, major regeneration or corporate initiatives, where dedicated resources are required to offer enhanced and concentrated service levels.

External resources are used at present. For example, agency and sole practitioner planners are used to deal with a significant number of householder planning applications and agency staff are used in regard to highways and administrative functions. However, this tends to be a tactical response to fill gaps that arise or to deal with peak workloads rather than a strategic approach that forms part of our resource planning and budgeting.

Further appraisals of the potential for appropriate use of private sector resources are underway. Research to date suggests that there is considerable private sector appetite and capacity for discrete and time limited commissions such as preparing Planning Briefs or Frameworks or dealing with planning appeals. However, cost estimates range from £100,000 to £180,000 for 220 days input, the notional time equivalent of a directly employed planning officer. Companies that offer greater capacity tend to charge higher fees, typically about £150,000 for 220 days. The full recovery cost of employing a Principal Planning Officer is a maximum of £66,000.

Fewer consultants have expressed an interest in dealing with planning applications and only two have expressed any interest in enforcement work.

Whilst ad hoc commissioning of consultants remains an option, for flexible and external resourcing of planned workloads to make good business sense, it would be necessary to develop a sound basis for a strategic alliance that offered lower unit costs. A number of leading planning consultants have expressed a willingness to explore this concept. Appraisals of innovative forms of strategic partnerships with private sector suppliers are underway and will require separate and subsequent reports on their potential. The aims of an alliance would include:

- ❑ affordability
- ❑ access to a flexible mix and amount of skills and resources
- ❑ skills transfer and mutual learning
- ❑ mutual benefits to recruit and retain high quality professional planners etc.
- ❑ potential mutual commercial benefits in nationally scarce skills and knowledge

The keys to developing an affordable partnership package will include the ability to offer a significant volume of work over time. In order to assess the extent of a possible package of partnership work, and whether it is likely to achieve a critical mass, it is sensible to look across the whole planning function, including Planning Policy, Local Planning and Sustainable Development functions as well as application and appeals related work.

### **What is not a priority?**

We need to maintain consensus with stakeholders on a clear system of service priorities to maintain focus on our main priorities and to tailor our activities to available resources and capacity. Whilst clear priorities are a basic need for all organisations, and of course



we have them, we are subject to multiple and competing expectations and there is no consensus on what is not a priority despite clear limits on the resources available.

Any debate on what should be afforded a low priority, and therefore might not be done at times of peak workload or resource constraints, will inevitably be difficult. There is nothing that we do that is without value or importance for at least one set of stakeholders. However, we must emphasise activities that have the greatest impact on the achievement of government, strategic partnership, and corporate objectives.

We should afford the highest level of importance to major and strategically important developments, including key regeneration projects and developments associated with established strategies, and to projects linked to the delivery of sustainable communities and corporate objectives (eg. Schools, Capital or Healthcare projects). Similarly, there is a consensus that time critical procedures, for example those associated with Telecommunications equipment, and compliance activity including formal enforcement action, should be afforded the highest level of priority. At the same time, we must ensure that the service improvement activities arising from this Strategic Review are properly resourced to secure their implementation.

We also need to increase community engagement, particularly on major planning applications, in accordance with the Council's Statement of Community Involvement. Pre-application discussions on major industrial & commercial are of great importance and, at a customer service level, we need to deal more effectively with ombudsman enquiries and substantiated service complaints.

There is very little scope for reducing or suspending service levels at times that demands on resources exceed supply. To make any appreciable impact, any service adjustment would need to apply to an otherwise high volume activity. One service that fits this category is pre-application discussions for domestic extensions and alterations, where publication of freely available high quality design guidance should suffice to illustrate the standards that the Council seeks to achieve, and help applicants to produce acceptable proposals.

### **Outcomes to justify inputs**

Whilst there are very few aspects of the service that can be reduced or curtailed, an alternative approach is available. That is to control more effectively the time and resource inputs expended on individual cases or activities, in order to provide an adequate service level that is fit for purpose, whilst controlling costs at affordable levels. A major exercise is necessary to achieve significant service redesign following these cost / benefit principles, and there will always be a need for justifiable flexibility according to the merits of individual cases, but this exercise is timely in the context of our Information & Communication Technology Programme, and should be set within the context of the delivery plan for this Strategic Change Programme.

### **Individual customer choice and expectations**

Since resources will always be finite, and the demands and expectations of customers will always vary, an effective balance needs to be struck between individual customer choice and service efficiency. Service levels need to be clearly set out and explained,

following development through consultation with customers. Whilst meaningful customer choice must be an objective, there can be a tendency for disproportionate resources to be expended on unrealistic or unreasonable expectations.

### **Implications of changes in planning policy and corporate initiatives**

Many changes in planning policy are derived directly from changes in legislation or government guidance. Other changes are generated locally through the Local Development Framework and associated Supplementary Planning Documents. In some cases, policy changes are introduced without sufficient assessment of the resource implications that will arise from their implementation.

At the same time corporate initiatives often have significant implications for resource allocations and, given their importance to priority objectives of the Council such as regeneration, resources will often need to be realigned, putting pressure on other aspects of the service. We need to understand fully the resource implications of new initiatives and policy changes in preparing for their implementation.

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## **IMPROVEMENT THEME 2 : REALISING A DEFINITIVE OFFICER VIEW**

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### **Planned Outcomes -**

- **More certainty for developers and communities.**
- **More clarity on the standards of development that Leeds requires.**
- **Better guidance for developers and householders.**
- **Greater efficiency in dealing with development proposals.**

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|-----|--|
| 2.1 | Improved internal mechanisms are being established to resolve different views and produce clear and timely decisions, providing a clear and effective framework for identified decision makers.  |
| 2.2 | Agree a structured Urban Design approach to assessing quality, for the guidance of designers and to provide a consistent assessment framework for officers and Plans Panels.   |
| 2.3 | Improve the ways in which Design, Landscape and Conservation inputs are integrated into negotiations on development proposals to achieve greater efficiency and ensure that the focus on producing high quality development is effectively targeted. |
| 2.4 | Improve procedures for pre-application enquiries, setting clear standards for the services we can offer, including greater clarity as to the issues considered and consultations undertaken, and a clear record of pre-application outcomes.         |
| 2.5 | Produce a high quality and freely available Householder Design Guide to help drive up the quality of development, provide greater clarity and minimise the need for pre-application enquiries on householder planning applications.                  |
| 2.6 | Produce a high quality and comprehensive Highways Design Guide to help drive up the standards of development and provide greater clarity for architects, designers and engineers.  |
| 2.7 | Improve working arrangements with Legal Services to ensure timely, effective and economic inputs to planning and enforcement services.   |
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## **Commentary**

### **Closer Working, Better Services**

Since the “Closer Working, Better Services” restructuring, 3 years ago, services have been organised to make better connections between related functions and to avoid “silo” thinking. For example, strategic work on planning, economic and transportation policy was brought together (in Strategy and Policy) as were the development management arms of planning and highways (in Planning and Development Services).

Whilst many benefits of the reorganised structure have been realised, and Development Department linkages are successful at a strategic level, the potential for fragmentation of other important linkages has always been recognised. For example, we need to consider whether the links between Planning Services [the development management function], Local Planning, Planning Policy and the specialist functions [minerals, design, landscape, conservation] in the Sustainable Development Unit are effective, efficient, and deliver the intended outcomes.

### **Developer and Community confidence**

Decision making processes need to be efficient and consistent, and the reasons for decisions that are taken need to be clearly stated. The fundamental purposes of our decision making must be to achieve quality outcomes, in accordance with the Council’s core values, to implement the City Council’s policies and achieve its objectives. In order to maintain the confidence and commitment of investors in Leeds, and the continuation of the city’s economic success, investors need to have confidence that early advice and opinions can be relied upon (within reasonable bounds) in order to justify the development of detailed proposals for formal consideration.

At the same time, communities need to be confident that full regard and consideration will be given to their views, concerns and ideas. The City Council is currently consulting on its Statement of Community Involvement, and detailed work is in hand to review aspects of our current practices in this regard.

### **A definitive officer view**

New approaches and processes are being developed to generate a holistic and definitive officer view on development proposals, taking all internal perspectives into account, in order to avoid conflicting messages and uncertainty. Any divergence of views between, for example, the policy specialists and the case planners dealing with specific development proposals need to be resolved quickly and should be resolved internally before they are externally expressed. The identity and responsibility of the decision maker should be clear to all concerned.

By its nature, the planning system and the policy framework within which it operates is subject to tensions. Often, users’ expectations are diametrically opposed. For example, the expectations of those proposing development and those opposing it can be difficult to reconcile. Planning provides a framework for managed negotiation between competing priorities and interests: indeed, there is a degree of inherent conflict in national policy guidance that the Council needs to resolve at the local level. The scope

for this Review is to secure effective ways of reaching internal agreement on competing outcome priorities as quickly and consistently as possible.

Better approaches are required to achieve our objectives of securing high standards of design, architecture and implementation. Our arrangements for “consultation” on design, landscape and conservation issues need to optimise our use of available resources. Improvements can be made within existing organisational structures, but must ensure that focus on producing high quality development is effectively targeted..

Working arrangements with Legal Services should also be reviewed to ensure that they are sufficiently responsive and integrate as seamlessly as possible into the planning services they support. As with all elements of the service, legal advice and operations must deliver the required outcomes efficiently and economically. Legal inputs are key to our performance on legal agreements governing planning obligations and to the effectiveness of our planning enforcement services.

### **A structured approach to assessing the quality of development**

To achieve consistency there needs to be a clear understanding of what it is that the Council is seeking to achieve. We have our planning policy framework, of course, and the way we elaborate on that through Supplementary Planning Documents and less formal guidance needs to continue to evolve and, where possible, be accelerated.

We also need to continue to build on the workshops we held with housebuilders in late 2005. A number of ideas emerged that require further development. Much of our approach to those workshops was related to our design guide, “Neighbourhoods for Living”. This guidance, and our “City Centre Urban Design Strategy”, are well established.

However, there is scope to reinforce these guides by the introduction of a structured urban design approach to assessing the quality of development proposals. Development of and consultation on assessment criteria could help build increased awareness and consensus amongst all types of stakeholder. An adopted framework approach would provide a clear set of criteria to guide submissions, officer assessment and member consideration of development schemes.

In addition to guidance that elaborates planning policy or provides an overview framework for assessing larger development, there is also a need to update and replace the guidance we provided for householder development. Work is in progress to produce up to date guidance to meet this need.

At the same time, work is underway to produce a Highways Design Guide to set out more clearly for developers the standards that we seek to achieve. This will need to inter-relate effectively with urban design guidance etc.

Other planned guidance (Supplementary Planning Documents) is set out in the Council’s Local Development Scheme.

The range and complexity of information that needs to be taken into account in decision making should be apparent from this report. Of course, the information base is subject constantly to change. That dynamism is compounded further by the constant turnover of

planning staff and regular changes in the membership of Plans panels. To help provide an easily accessible and up to date reference source, for officers and councillors, an intranet based compendium of policy, guidance and standards should be produced and kept up to date.

### **Pre-application discussions**

Pre-application discussions are encouraged since they can be instrumental in improving the quality of development schemes, make clear what is required for subsequent applications and screen out inappropriate proposals. From the developer's point of view, good quality pre-application work can help build certainty and confidence and prevent waste. For communities, they are helpful in facilitating early engagement.

However, if these aims are to be achieved, pre-application discussions need to be thorough, of high quality, and as informative as possible. Stakeholders need confidence in the advice that is given, and the advice needs to be heeded by developers. One aspect of this is the involvement of Plans Panels dealt with elsewhere in this report. However, other aspects of our processes and practices need to be reviewed and improved, setting clear standards for the services we can offer, including greater clarity as to the issues considered and consultations undertaken, and a clear record of pre-application outcomes.

Despite the benefits of pre-application discussions, it can not be envisaged that resource levels will ever allow the availability of staff for pre-application discussions on every development in Leeds. In these circumstances, our priority should be to resource pre-application discussions on ; -

- ❑ all major commercial and industrial developments,
- ❑ housing developments
- ❑ changes of use of land or buildings
- ❑ Other schemes that have been refused but which might in principle be acceptable if revised
- ❑ Other schemes where special circumstances apply

For the majority of planning applications, comprising domestic extensions and alterations and minor industrial or commercial applications, publication of freely available high quality design guidance should suffice to illustrate the standards that the Council seeks to achieve, and help applicants to produce acceptable proposals. Many of these schemes are designed by planning agents specialising in the field. These agents should soon become familiar with the design guidance.

It should also be mentioned that the government is understood to be considering changes to the "householder" consent regime. Whilst the nature or timing of any outcomes are not known, it is anticipated that any changes will seek to simplify the householder consents regime.

### **Post decision processes**

It is not uncommon for designs or proposals to be changed after an approval has been issued. For many years, if such changes are not considered to fundamentally vary an application, they have been dealt with as minor-modifications. Whilst unnecessary

bureaucracy should be avoided, we are review these practices to ensure they are still appropriate and, if they are not, decide how they should be replaced. Simplified procedures may remain appropriate for “non material” amendments, but a tightening up of the use of such procedures is required.

### **IMPROVEMENT THEME 3 : DEVELOPMENT OF AND SUPPORT FOR PLANS PANELS**

#### **Planned Outcomes -**

- **Earlier inputs by Plans Panels to give guidance on the issues raised by development proposals, aiding efficient and consistent decision making.**
- **Better informed and trained members of Plans Panels supported by improved processes to deliver more efficient, effective and consistent consideration of proposals by Plans Panels.**
- **An improved experience of Plans Panels for the public and developers to give greater customer satisfaction.**

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| 3.1 | Develop protocols for early presentation of schemes to Plans Panels including the recording, communication of and reference to the Panel’s initial views on the issues raised by development proposals at later decision making stages.       |
| 3.2 | Increase the capacity of Plans Panels to receive early presentations, introducing additional meetings, reducing the number of members of East and West Plans Panels but maintaining a pool of trained members to achieve realistic workloads. |
| 3.3 | Introduce a compulsory minimum standard of training and briefing for all councillors who serve on Plans Panels and deliver the required programme of training and briefing to secure and maintain the agreed standards.                       |
| 3.4 | Update protocols for Site Visits and for Public Speaking at Plans Panels to improve efficiency and equity.  |
| 3.5 | Introduce section on the history of negotiations to Plans Panel Reports to ensure that Members are aware of the ways in which policy, design and community issues have been addressed.  |
| 3.6 | Improve training for officers presenting cases to panels to achieve consistently high standards of preparation and presentation skills.   |
| 3.7 | Review venue, presentation methods and public information for Plans Panels, including ways to avoid excessive waiting times for members of the public etc.  |

#### **Commentary**

Elected Members play a key role in decision making, particularly on major and complex planning issues. There are indications of a need for more confidence between elected members and officers and to take steps to ensure that Plans Panel processes and are seen to be of consistently high quality. There is an opportunity for Plans Panels to operate in ways that are more creative and influential, whilst avoiding the pitfalls of “design by committee”.

There is considerable frustration in the development industry about the way our processes work at present. Some of this reflects frustrations about the planning system generally and are inherent in the planning system. Some frustrations relate to the way our Plans Panel processes work, including strong views that some deferrals of

decisions could be avoided and that debate should be focussed more clearly on the “material” planning issues.

The clarity and effectiveness of officer presentations is a factor. We need to prioritise training in this regard and improve formats, in order to improve standards. Whilst high quality presentations are regularly achieved, we need to ensure that standards are consistently of the highest order. Officers presenting cases to panels need to be well versed in the detail of the proposals and their negotiation. That implies a readiness for relatively inexperienced officers to present items. Relatively inexperienced officers will need a supportive environment. Plans Panel Chairs, panel members and the Area Manager co-ordinating the Panel can assist in creating the right environment to build confidence whilst developing the quality and effectiveness of presentations.

Panel members have indicated that more details of the history of the prior negotiations between officers and developers would be helpful, to set out how the scheme has evolved and how policy, design and community considerations have been addressed. In addition, we are developing a structured urban design approach to assessing development quality, which should help facilitate a soundly based and consistent approach to the debate of the merits of proposed development. Members have indicated that the availability of authoritative design analysis and advice at Plans Panels is of real value in helping members assimilate the complex design issues that arise on major developments.

Changes to encourage and facilitate early engagement on development proposals are required to help improve community involvement and information, help developers progress their proposals with more confidence and, ultimately, help all concerned improve the quality of development in Leeds. Updated Plans Panel processes and approaches are proposed to ensure that Panels have the opportunity to understand and comment on major development proposals at an early stage, and that the early views of Members are recorded, communicated and referred to at later decision stages. This needs to be achieved whilst maintaining the highest levels of probity, without pre-determination of proposals, and in ways that maintain public confidence. This approach has been piloted with some success with the Central Area Panel.

It is important to recognise that serving on a Plans Panel is a demanding commitment for elected members to make in terms of time, energy, responsibility and difficulty. We need to do all we can to encourage, assist and support elected members to make that commitment, in order to build a pool of well informed and enthusiastic councillors prepared to undertake this critically important role on behalf of the City Council.

Greater investment in briefing, training, information and support for Panel Members including a well organised programme of inter-active study events, outcome and appeal reviews, technical updates etc. This will require commitment on the part of officers and Members to ensure that the package is comprehensive, of high quality, and that all Plans Panel Members benefit from it. It is recommended that there should be a compulsory minimum standard of briefing and training for all councillors who serve on Plans Panels.

In order to accommodate an increased number of pre-application or preliminary presentation of major development schemes to Plans Panels, it will be necessary to increase the capacity of Plans Panels to make time available. It is recommended that

the number of members of the East and West Panels is reduced and the number and frequency of East and West Panel meetings increased to match projected workload. To help control the demands on individual panel members, and ensure that sufficient numbers of appropriately trained panel members are available, a “pool” of members should be nominated and trained to allow for substitutions as required.

Other practical steps that need to be taken in regard to Plans Panels include the following –

- The current venue for Plans panels is not ideal. Alternatives have been considered in the past but no suitable options have been identified. That needs to be revisited, and we should review whether alternative technology (eg. Networked display screens) would assist Members and the public who attend. In addition, better information for the public (in advance of and at the Panel meetings) on the purpose, organisation, processes and conduct of meetings should be produced.
- On the same theme, we need to re-examine ways in which the scheduling and timing of items could be organised to avoid long waiting times for people attending panel meetings for specific items.
- A review of existing protocols for site visits and public speaking would be timely, in the light of experience since their introduction. Consideration should be given to undertaking site visits prior to the date of the Plans Panel to help spread the sometimes excessive demands on Panel Members and presenting officers on Panel meeting days.

Finally, in this section, valuable feedback on Plans Panel processes has been gained through open discussions between elected members who chair or have chaired plans panels, experienced representatives of the Property Forum, and senior officers with long and detailed experience of the panel decision making processes. There is a readiness on the part of all participants to continue to build on this approach to improve communication and mutual understanding. It is an approach that could be mirrored with other groups of key stakeholders.



## **IMPROVEMENT THEME 4 : INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY**

### **Planned Outcomes -**

- **Improved range and quality of internet-based services to give 24 hour and 7 day public access to information, advice and communication channels.**
- **Efficient, effective and economic customer focussed services.**
- **On-line public access to planning applications to improve communication and promote community engagement.**
- **Efficient use of technology to improve business efficiency and effectiveness at affordable costs.**

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- 4.1 Continue current work to realise the planned benefits of the new spatial and data computer system, which provides the essential platform for the further developments referred to below.
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- 4.2 Implement new Public Access channels facilitated by the new computer system to enable applicants to track progress on their application and provide improved information for all interested parties.
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- 4.3 Implement new modules linked to the new computer system, including Tree Preservation Orders and development monitoring for enforcement purposes etc.
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- 4.4 Implement End to End web based services, new self-service channels and links to information and services available through the national Planning Portal, including interactive access to Development Plans etc.
- 
- 4.5 Implement Electronic Document Management systems to transform information storage, access and communication, and to facilitate on-line public access to planning applications.
- 
- 4.6 Apply Business Process Re-engineering principles to all services to ensure that they are focused on their customers and are efficiently delivered.
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### **Commentary**

#### **ICT capacity**

It is essential that we continue to develop effective Information and Communication Technology to facilitate the delivery of our services, performance management and increase customer choice in accessing information and participation. This will include “self-service” channels. We are investing heavily in new Information Technology, including a new spatial and data system, web based services and Electronic Document Management and Retrieval systems.

#### **Business Process Re-engineering**

Effective process improvements are planned to ensure that the benefits of investment in ICT are maximised. This “Business Process Re-engineering” will seek to -

- ❑ Identify where value is added and eliminate activity that does not add value
- ❑ Bring value adding activities together physically & organisationally
- ❑ Move analysis, diagnosis and decision activities to as early a stage of the process chain as possible, avoiding duplication of effort.
- ❑ Create separate processes for complex transactions and fast-track methods for routine transactions

## Impact of accommodation

We need to assess the impacts of our current accommodation arrangements on workflows, productivity and communication. We know from staff feedback that this is an important concern that impacts negatively on staff morale. We must seek opportunities to address any negative impacts. A review of these matters is currently underway on a department wide basis.

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### **IMPROVEMENT THEME 5 : IMPROVED CUSTOMER SERVICES**

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#### **Planned Outcomes -**

- **High quality customer services.**
- **Increased community engagement.**
- **Clear and comprehensive information for customers.**
- **Clear service standards against which performance can be measured.**
- **Higher levels of customer satisfaction.**

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| 5.1 | Use Charter Mark standards to measure customer service and to drive continuous improvement.   |
| 5.2 | Implement new approaches for dealing with complaints, compliments and ombudsman enquiries to harness learning and implement service improvements more effectively.  |
| 5.3 | Prepare for implementation of the Statement of Community Involvement, which has been subject to extensive consultation.   |
| 5.4 | Extend neighbour notification for planning applications to include all applications and telecommunication notifications where the site is in a residential area.  |
| 5.5 | Update all information sources and channels to provide extensive & clear “up front” guidance for customers on the services we offer.  |
| 5.6 | Publish a new “Guide to Planning Services” including Service Standards to make clear the level of services that we offer, and help avoid common misconceptions about the purposes and nature of those services. |
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### **Commentary**

#### **Improved Customer Services**

All users of the planning service should be able to access the service at locations and times geared to customer needs, quick responses should be provided and there should be a general overall feeling of ‘welcome’. We are assessing all of our services against “Charter Mark” standards to measure their approach to customer service and to drive continuous improvement.

We already receive and respond to customer feedback. However, our approach to this needs to be more systematic and we will put into place new measures to collect and respond to customer and stakeholder feedback continuously, and to assess the value added by our interventions.

An important aspect of Customer Service is the effectiveness with which we deal with any service related shortcomings that result in complaints. We have piloted changes to our approach that now need to be built upon. However, we need to do more to ensure that we deal with ombudsman enquiries more quickly and expeditiously. That will require a greater allocation of resources.

### **Communication and Information Services**

This review should help ensure that all stakeholders, including our staff, know that their concerns are understood and know what we are doing to address them. In addition, we need to keep open communication channels and mechanisms for listening, information giving, and debate. To be effective, these for a need to be properly resourced in regard to administration, preparation, and follow up of agreed actions.

All information sources and channels, particularly Internet and Intranet channels, need to be reviewed to ensure that information is comprehensive, up-to-date, clear and accessible. A "Guide to Planning Services" is to be produced to make clear the services we are able to provide and equally clear the services we are not able to offer. Our service standards should be clearly set out within this guide.

### **Community involvement on planning applications**

The Submission stage Statement of Community Involvement is in preparation. This includes information on –

- how we currently consult on planning applications
- the role of the applicant / developer
- pre-application consultation
- requirements for planning application submission
- the effect of failure to undertake community involvement
- how people can comment on planning applications

The Statement makes reference to this review and possible changes that may arise from it. We are reviewing current policy and practice for publicity of planning applications and neighbour notification, including our policy on publicising amendments.

## **PART F : CHANGE DELIVERY PLAN**

The outcomes of this review need to be implemented in a co-ordinated and effective way and we need to be clear how each action, change or workstream is to be resourced. The mechanism for achieving the necessary co-ordination and scheduling is the Change Delivery Plan. The Change Delivery Plan is being developed in parallel with the review stage and an interim version is in use for those early changes that can be implemented prior to completion of the review stage.

Some financial provision for implementation of the Delivery Plan has been made in revenue budget estimates for 2006/07. The changes proposed are extensive and it will be necessary to agree relative priorities in terms of timing and the allocation of available resources. It should be noted that the service revenue budget is extremely sensitive to changes in activity levels and which impact significantly on planning fee income, the main source of revenue to the service. Not all changes will require additional resources, and in some cases savings will offset at least part of new resource requirements.

Each change theme will have a lead officer, reporting to the Chief Planning and Development Officer who will co-ordinate the change programme through an implementation team. The Development Department's Management Team will monitor progress on the implementation programme. In the following table, the estimated costs and timings are provisional estimates subject to identification of priorities through the Departmental and Executive Board consideration of this review report.

### CHANGE DELIVERY PLAN : SUMMARY

Ref.	IMPROVEMENT THEME 1 : CAPACITY BUILDING & WORKING WITH THE PRIVATE SECTOR	TIMING	ESTIMATED COST
1.1	Enable planning support and enquiry centre staff to deal with a greater proportion of enquiries and customer relationships by developing their roles and skills.	Q2\3 06\07	£80,000
1.2	Achieve a structured and pooled approach to skills development of support and customer service staff to deliver operational flexibility and enhanced career paths.	Q2\3 06\07	Existing resources
1.3	Increase the number of staff at Principal Planner level.	Q3 06\07	£175,000
1.4	Increase the number of senior staff in Compliance Services to support the new Enforcement Policy and integrate operations with Planning Services more closely.	Q3 06\07	£40,000
1.5	Leadership of focussed cultural change at senior and middle management levels is fundamental to the effectiveness of this review. Some adjustment to management roles and responsibilities will help achieve that.	Not yet known	£100,000
1.6	Improve longer term workforce planning and development to secure the future availability of required skills and to realise the full potential of our people.	From 06\07	Existing resources
1.7	Determine the scope and costs of a strategic alliance with a private sector partner to provide flexible access to skills and resources.	Q2 06\07	Not yet known
1.8	Maintain clarity about priorities in terms of objectives and services, and monitor the extent to which resource inputs deliver desired outcomes.	From Q2 06\07	Existing resources
1.9	Improve the range, quality and accessibility of Self Service channels including internet, intranet and intelligent enquiry systems, in order to release staff time to deliver other priority services.	From Q2 06\07	£50,000

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<b>Ref.</b>	<b>IMPROVEMENT THEME 2 : REALISING A DEFINITIVE OFFICER VIEW</b>	<b>TIMING</b>	<b>ESTIMATED COST</b>
2.1	Improved internal mechanisms are being established to resolve different views and produce clear and timely decisions, providing a clear and effective framework for identified decision makers.	Q1 06\07	Existing resources
2.2	Agree a structured Urban Design approach to assessing quality, for the guidance of designers and to provide a consistent assessment framework for officers and Plans Panels.	Q2\3 06\07	£25,000
2.3	Improve the ways in which Design, Landscape and Conservation inputs are integrated into negotiations on development proposals to achieve greater efficiency and ensure that the focus on producing high quality development is effectively targeted.	Q2 06\07	Existing resources
2.4	Improve procedures for pre-application enquiries, setting clear standards for the services we can offer, including greater clarity as to the issues considered and consultations undertaken, and a clear record of pre-application outcomes.	Q2 06\07	Existing resources
2.5	Produce a high quality and freely available Householder Design Guide to help drive up the quality of development, provide greater clarity and minimise the need for pre-application enquiries on householder planning applications.	Q2 06\07	Existing resources
2.6	Produce a high quality and comprehensive Highways Design Guide to help drive up the standards of development and provide greater clarity for architects, designers and engineers.	Q2 06\07	Existing resources
2.7	Improve working arrangements with Legal Services to ensure timely, effective and economic inputs to planning and enforcement services.	Q2 06\07	Existing resources

<b>Ref.</b>	<b>IMPROVEMENT THEME 3 : DEVELOPMENT OF AND SUPPORT FOR PLANS PANELS</b>	<b>TIMING</b>	<b>ESTIMATED COST</b>
3.1	Develop protocols for early presentation of schemes to Plans Panels including the recording, communication of and reference to the Panel's initial views on the issues raised by development proposals at later decision making stages.	Q2 06\07	Existing resources
3.2	Increase the capacity of Plans Panels to receive early presentations, introducing additional meetings, reducing the number of members of East and West Plans Panels but maintaining a pool of trained members to achieve realistic workloads.	Q2 06\07	£20,000
3.3	Introduce a compulsory minimum standard of training and briefing for all councillors who serve on Plans Panels and deliver the required programme of training and briefing to secure and maintain the agreed standards.	Q2 06\07	£10,000
3.4	Update protocols for Site Visits and for Public Speaking at Plans Panels to increase efficiency and equity.	Q2 06\07	Existing resources
3.5	Introduce section on the history of negotiations to Plans Panel Reports to ensure that Members are aware of the ways in which policy, design and community issues have been addressed.	Q2 06\07	Existing resources
3.6	Improve training for officers presenting cases to panels to achieve consistently high standards of preparation and presentation skills.	Q3 06\07	Existing resources
3.7	Review venue, presentation methods and public information for Plans Panels, including ways to avoid excessive waiting times for members of the public etc.	Q2\3 06\07	Existing resources



## **PART G : RESOURCE CONSIDERATIONS**

### **2006/07 Budget.**

The approved 2006/07 budget for Planning & Development Services is:-

	£
Expenditure	9,724,470
Income	<u>7,530,490</u>
Net Expenditure	2,193,980

The budget settlement allowed for certain pressures and requirements identified by the service, principally £250,000 in respect of estimated year 1 costs associated with the strategic review, and £350,000 reduction in the Planning Delivery Grant. No provision was made though to cover the current “temporary” staffing expenditure, estimated at £240,000, which will have to be managed through the year.

The full costs associated with the introduction of document imaging have not been included in the 06/07 budget. Should funding be required to meet these costs over and above the divisions’ budget allocation the resources can be made available from elsewhere within the Department.

New and additional income sources have been identified within the service, notably income from administration fees from S278 agreements (£40,000) and S106 agreements (£85,000).

### **2007 -2009 Estimated budget.**

On the basis of the current resource allocation and budget plan the estimated budget for the next two years is:-

	2007/08	2008/09
	£	£
Expenditure	10,034,170	10,316,830
Income	<u>7,617,380</u>	<u>7,730,180</u>
Net Expenditure	2,416,790	2,586,650

Assumptions made within these projections include

- Increases in pay and accommodation costs will be funded as part of the Council’s budget strategy.
- Staffing levels will remain constant to that budgeted for in 2006/07, plus any increased requirement met from the additional £250,000 provided for this review.
- PDG will continue until the end of 2007/08 after which its future is uncertain being dependent on the Governments spending review.
- An increase in the level of planning fee prices will not occur in 2007/08, but a 10% increase has been assumed in 2008/09 in lieu of the estimated end of PDG.
- The current allocation of £250,000 to cover the cost of the strategic review will continue year on year.
- Income from Building fees and licences will increase by 3% annually.

## Considerations

The main area of financial concern for the service is its heavy dependency on external funding in meeting its budget, in excess of £7.5m annually. Approximately only 25% of the service is funded by the Authority. The difficulty of continually achieving these levels is further complicated by the fact that its main sources of income are reliant on the economic conditions prevailing in the country and/or region.

For the service any change in these conditions can have a significant effect on the budget, either increasing or decreasing demand, it should therefore be regarded as an area of high risk. Work should therefore be undertaken in developing alternative financial strategies to potential variations in external factors.

The question of staffing resources, both in terms of numbers and experience, is a fundamental issue for this review. It is important to note though that the current staffing resources, with temporary and outsourced resources left at present levels, will cost approximately £240,000 over the agreed budget. To address this issue current staffing levels need to be examined and brought into line with the budget, or any ongoing need identified as part of the strategic review and funded from the additional financial provision. The strategy is to design out these "temporary" pressures.

In 2005/06 a proposal was made to introduce charges in respect of pre-application work, however for a variety of reasons it was decided not to introduce this charge. This did not preclude the search for new income sources and as part of the 2006/07 budget process potential new areas of charge were identified. It is proposed that work should continue on this but that no firm commitment to their introduction be made until all aspects have been closely considered.

Other areas will need to be considered as implementation progresses, these include

- The realisation of any efficiencies (Gershon), either cash or non-cashable.
- Prioritisation of improvements arising from the review.
- The most efficient and effective use of the additional resources.
- Optimising income and controlling expenditure.



**PART H : RISK ASSESSMENT**

A detailed risk assessment has been prepared and is monitored through standing departmental management arrangements. Brief extracts are included in the following table, with probability and impact ratings expressed in accordance with the Council's standard approach.

<b>RISK</b>	<b>STRENGTH CONTROLS</b>	<b>PROBABILITY</b>	<b>IMPACT</b>	<b>RATING</b>	<b>ACTIONS</b>
<b>Failure to agree Implementation Plan for Strategic Review</b>	Good	3	5	VH	Maintain direction and impetus, seeking consensus on key issues. Continue and accelerate briefings and presentations
<b>The costs of implementation of Strategic Review exceed currently allocated resources</b>	Good	4	4	VH	Rigorous examination of new and existing costs to seek savings to supplement £250k resource allocation. Prioritise elements of implementation as necessary.
<b>Failure to implement agreed Delivery Plan for Strategic Review</b>	Good	3	4	H	Delivery plan needs to be robust, realistic and properly resourced
<b>Delay in realisation of benefits from ICT investment</b>	Good	3	4	H	Implementation Team with clear roles and rigorous project management
<b>Unable to appoint the required additional staff</b>	Good	3	4	H	Review recruitment package following current recruitment activity
<b>Fee income is less than budget estimates</b>	Good	3	5	VH	Monitor and intervene as necessary – control expenditure according to projections as far as possible – Optimise other sources of income

## **PART I : CONSULTATION**

To date, consultations on issues and priorities have involved the following stakeholders to help produce a robust report for wider and more formal consideration:

- Project Team
- Project Board
- Elected Member Board
- Staff Forum
- Trade Unions
- Leeds Chamber Property Forum

A consultation on the identified priorities was circulated in January 2006 to all Councillors, to staff, and to Town and Parish Councils. Whilst the number of responses to the consultation was relatively small, the feedback was of useful quality. In the main, respondents agreed that the priorities for improvement had been correctly identified.

Consultees were asked to indicate which of the nine priorities were most important from their perspective, and to add any issues that considered should be included. Several and various suggestions were raised and, generally speaking, these are now covered in this final report. The overall weighting of the priorities identified the following as the top five –

1. Core resource levels and skills
2. Clear and consistent decisions
3. One team working
4. Improved information and communication
5. Develop Plans Panels

The importance of investing in Information and Communications Technology was also commonly recognised.

A detailed report has been made available to all staff and Trade Unions for comment in April 2006 and staff events have been held to discuss the findings and implementation plan.

The detailed report was presented to Scrutiny Board (Development) on the 25<sup>th</sup> April 2006. Scrutiny Board commented on the report and noted its recommendations. It was resolved that progress on the solutions outlined in the report be scrutinised at a future meeting of the Board.

## **PART J ; CONCLUSIONS**

This review has been conducted in a way that has involved a range of stakeholders and engaged a large number of staff at key stages. Whilst this has inevitably taken time, building understanding and support is an essential stage of an effective change programme. In addition to the improvement actions included in the final report, numerous other issues have been identified and addressed in the course of the review. Similarly, certain options such as significant organisational change have been considered and assessed but not included in the final recommendations.

Consultation has demonstrated that the five key Improvement Themes are appropriate and necessary. These key themes are underpinned by a range of defined actions to improve performance and outcomes.

Fundamental to the effectiveness of this review is the need to continue to change and develop the culture of all associated services to promote collective ownership of priorities and of issues, and to emphasise the delivery of solutions. In due course, some adjustment to middle management roles and responsibilities may help achieve that. However, in the short term the Chief Officers responsible for Planning & Development and for Strategy & Policy will jointly emphasise and build on the outcomes of the review stage to ensure that Heads of Services and Team Leaders are able to drive and deliver the change required to maintain continuous improvement.

Subject to this leadership on matters of cultural change, and the effective management of the identified risks, it is considered that the changes described in this report will deliver significant and sustainable service improvements. Some changes will be visible relatively quickly. Others, including the technological changes, will take more time to come to fruition. The delivery of the improvement plan will be monitored closely.