

TRA OVERVIEW – UPDATED REPORT

Cabinet: 8 June 2010

Resolution Required

Report Deputy Chief Executive

REPORT SUMMARY

How does the content of this report improve the quality of life of Borough Residents

Implementation of the Trevor Roberts Associates (TRA) review will ensure the Council has a planning service which is focused on delivery of outcomes which are important to the local community.

Purpose of Report

To update Cabinet on the main recommendations of the TRA review of planning services, and explain what key decisions need to be made.

Key Issues

- TRA review concludes that the planning service is “essentially sound”
- The key recommendation is a move towards development management (more emphasis pre and post application)
- Resources are required in planning administration (officer support) and enforcement (development monitoring)
- There is an immediate need for staff development regarding customer service

Financial Implications

The vast majority of the TRA recommendations will require additional officer time. Any additional staff resources would need to be budgeted for in 2010/11 onwards, and considered alongside other possible changes to staffing levels within the service. The PDG Transition Reserve may be used for some areas of the review. Additional funding for possible further IT improvements would be assessed on the basis of individual business cases being put forward for specific changes. This may be achievable with the use of Planning Delivery Grant (PDG).

Corporate Priority 3. Environment, 12. Developing staff and councillors

Officer Recommendation

1. Cabinet to note the TRA review, recommendations and the key actions.
2. Cabinet to agree that MAT and the Leader’s Monitoring Group oversee monitoring and ensure the effective delivery of the Action Plans arising from the review, and report back to Cabinet (initially on a quarterly basis).

Report Author:

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Cabinet member: Cllr Smith-Ainsley

MAIN REPORT

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Trevor Roberts Associates (TRA) were employed to undertake an external review of the planning service in late 2009, as a result of a desire by the Leader to seek to improve the services offered to the local community. TRA undertook a comprehensive review of the development control service itself, but also looked at wider aspects of planning within the Council including planning committee, member involvement, as well as corporate awareness and understanding.
- 1.2 At the same time as the review was being undertaken the Council undertook a series of surveys (applicants/agents, contributors, residents associations/amenity groups and members) to gain an external view of the service. These results were incorporated into the final TRA report.
- 1.3 The final report was received on 12 March 2010, and was released to staff and the general public the following week. There were some 270 recommendations principally covering processes and customer care issues. Staff have developed a series of action plans in order to prioritise the recommendations made. The focus of this report is on those changes which will affect the shape and ethos of the service, and to ensure we are more effective and efficient.
- 1.4 The report summarises that:

“Many aspects of the Development Control service in Spelthorne are essentially sound; in particular the processes geared to delivering the required level of performance on statutory aspects of the determination of applications and related planning matters.” But it also concluded that:

The Development Control service is not structured or resourced to deal with "outcomes" ie to ensure that development is carried out as approved. Public confidence in the delivery of the service will only be achieved if resources are invested in dealing with complaints and by having effective development monitoring seen to be happening on the ground.”

- 1.6 The report also made it very clear that there was an urgent requirement for the service to become more responsive to the needs of users, and for its central focus to be on its customers. This was also very evident through the feedback from the surveys which were undertaken at the same time.
- 1.7 A copy of the full TRA review is available in the Members Room (and is available on the Council's website – planning home page).

2. KEY ISSUES

- 2.1 The key recommendations as assessed by officers for the planning service (both internal and external) are set out below
 - Focus on moving to Development Management rather than being a Development Control service

- The management structure needs to be changed to ensure that the administration and development monitoring aspects are properly managed.
- A more rigorous approach to monitoring and managing processes, is needed
- There should be agreed priorities and regular reports on the wider level of performance to the Committee to keep councillors informed and as a means of informing the wider public of the work and achievements.
- Front end processing of applications needs to be fully documented and investment made in the use of ICT to speed up the processes and reduce some costs.
- Administrative Assistants, except in complex cases, to deal with all front end processes.
- A Development Monitoring and Compliance team is proposed to provide a structured approach to the monitoring of development. This will require additional staffing resources as well as administrative and ICT support.
- Major revisions to the scheme of delegation are needed to ensure that decisions are made at the lowest appropriate level and to make it simpler for people to understand.
- Public relations need to be addressed both to demonstrate the contribution of the planning service as a whole to the community and well being of Spelthorne and to improve the general understanding of how the planning system functions. This should include improvements to the website.
- Urgent need for customer care training to ensure that the change in approach is embedded across the whole service.
- Need for member training on planning and customer care issues

2.2 The recommendations seek to build and improve the level of service which we provide. The over-arching recommendation is the need to move to a service based on outcomes, rather than being purely oriented around the process of dealing with planning applications. It is clear from the report that the service may require additional resources if this change in approach is to be implemented. The change in emphasis will allow for a greater focus on further increasing the quality of the pre-application advice which we already provide, and in ensuring that a more corporate approach is taken to highlight opportunity for community gain (where appropriate).

2.3 Most crucially, however, the report suggests an increased focus on ensuring that development is carried out as approved. This element of the service (here and elsewhere) has historically had less emphasis placed on it (as it is not statutory). It is very evident from the surveys and the work done by TRA that the ability of the planning service to ensure this happens has a significant impact on the overall perception of the effectiveness of the service. Generally across Surrey, the level of resource put into enforcement is greater than at Spelthorne.

- 2.4 Another broad theme of the report is the need to make the most effective use of the current resources within the service, by “up-skilling” the administrative staff to a higher technical level. This will free up the professional officers to deal with their workloads more effectively and ‘stretch’ the less experienced officers. In turn this will allow the most senior officers to manage teams within the service giving the head of development management space to manage the overall performance of the service more effectively.
- 2.5 The increased emphasis on monitoring and the enlarged role for planning administration may well require additional staff (and a report will put to MAT for their consideration in the next month). These extra resources are critical if the service is to make the ‘step change’ it needs to effectively implement the TRA report recommendations in full.
- 2.6 The final broad theme which emerged from the report was the need for the service to be more outward looking, and more understanding of the expectations of the wider community. This will involve considerable staff training and development, particularly in relation to setting out what the service can and cannot do, and how public expectations can be best met.
- 2.7 The planning service is working with the Head of HR to implement a programme of training, covering development management and customer care. A tailored one day course for the whole of the planning team is being developed on customer focus, and will take place in the autumn.
- 2.8 All of these elements together will result in a service better able to understand and meet community needs and is more outcome-focused (where it is possible to do so within the wider planning framework).
- 2.9 It is critical that the recommendations in the review are carried forward and implemented so the public can be confident that the Council is committed to the changes. For this reason, its implementation needs to be carefully monitored and it is therefore suggested that the Leaders Monitoring Group oversees this function.

3. OPTIONS ANALYSIS

- 3.1 To agree the officer recommendations (preferred option).
- 3.2 Not to agree the officer recommendations.
- 3.3 To propose alternative recommendations

4. PROPOSALS

- 4.1 The report recommends that additional resources be put into the planning service within development support (currently administration) and development monitoring (currently enforcement). An emerging revised structure is set out in **Appendix 1**.
- 4.2 A team leader is suggested for these two areas to give additional professional expertise, but most importantly to manage these staff and their workloads.

Without these posts in place, it would be much more difficult for the service to move forwards at a speed which would see significant change in a relatively short period of time. These are the two Team Leader posts highlighted in orange on the emerging structure as set out in Appendix 1.

- 4.3 Development monitoring (currently enforcement) could only become more proactive and focused on effective prioritisation, if there is an additional resource which would give the team greater capacity. This could be achieved at a basic level with the additional team leader post.
- 4.4 The team leader post within development support (currently administration) would allow the section to drive forward change and deal effectively with performance management information. An additional resource would give the team much greater capacity and free up officer time to deal with more applications.
- 4.5 The two team leaders (referred to in paragraphs 4.2 - 4.4) would be required to free up capacity for the Head of Development Management to deal with managing the overall levels of performance of the service and to drive through the changes outlined in the review and beyond.
- 4.6 The report also suggests an additional two posts within the development monitoring team (currently enforcement). These are the development monitoring officer and the compliance technician posts highlighted in orange on the emerging structure in Appendix 1. However, the report acknowledges that it would be down to the Council to make a decision on the level of emphasis they wish to place on this aspect of the service. As an organisation we would need to make a decision on the additional emphasis we wish to place on this area of work at a more operational level.
- 4.7 Training will need to be developed and undertaken by the whole service regarding general customer care, but also tailored towards dealing with and managing customer expectations. This is taking place in the autumn, and will 'kick start' the process of changing the service to be more outward looking and responsive.
- 4.8 A series of plans have been developed which translates the recommendations of the review into actions. Broad details of these plans and some of the key priorities for action are attached at **Appendix 2**.
- 4.9 In light of the significance of the planning review to the overall reputation of the Council, it is essential that the Action Plans are delivered effectively and in line with the proposed timescales. It is therefore recommended that both MAT and the Leader Monitoring Group actively monitor delivery of the Plans, and ensure that corrective action is taken if the need arises.
- 4.10 It is suggested that once the key changes are in place the service be re-launched as a Development Management service.

5. BENEFITS AND SUSTAINABILITY

- 5.1 The key recommendations as set out above will enable the Council to provide a future planning service which is focused on dealing with outcomes, and is more outward looking. This will provide a service which is able to best meet the

challenges ahead and will enable it to build a solid reputation with the wider community.

- 5.2 As set out in para 2.5, the increased role of monitoring and an enlarged planning admin team may require additional resources. This needs to be seen in the context of the recent deletion of two senior planning officer posts, and possible future changes to staffing in other areas within the planning and housing strategy service within the next year. The recommendations of the review should aim to result in the re-focusing service rather than an enlargement.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The vast majority of the TRA recommendations would require additional staff time only.
- 6.2 Changes to the structure of the service, and other issues such as training and possible IT investment means that some additional financial resources might be necessary. The Council has a PDG transition reserve which may need to be called on if required.
- 6.3 Any additional resources in terms of staff would need to be built into revised estimates for 2010/11 and into future years budgets
- 6.4 Reports will come to Cabinet where required if additional revenue and capital budgets need to be found.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS/OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

- 7.1 There are legal and HR implications attached to a number of the reports recommendations. These will be addressed in individual reports as appropriate.

8. RISKS AND HOW THEY WILL BE MITIGATED

- 8.1 The Action Plans will be monitored by MAT and the Leader Monitoring Group. Individual risks will be addressed in separate reports as appropriate.

9. TIMETABLE FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- 9.1 MAT and the Leader's Monitoring Group will prioritize the Action Plan and set out timeframes for delivery.

Report Author:

Heather Morgan, Head of Planning and Housing Strategy (01784) 446352

Background Papers:

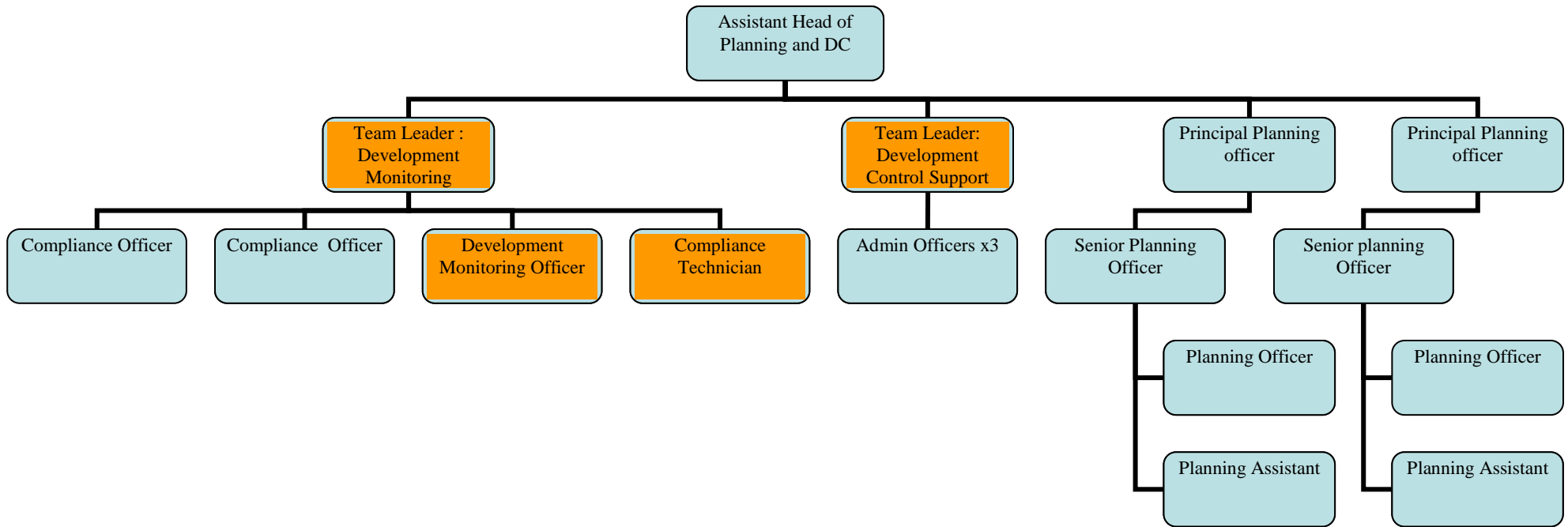
TRA review (Members Room and on the Council's website – planning home page)

Action Plan (Members Room)

Appendix 1 – emerging revised structure

Appendix 2 – Action Plan headings and key priorities

EMERGING STRUCTURE FOR DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT TEAM



TRA Planning Review – Action Plans

Action Plans

Seven separate action plans have been developed as a result of the recommendations set out in the TRA review. These cover different aspects of the service, and follow the five areas set out in the original brief to consultants. These are:

- | | |
|----|---|
| 1 | Structure/Flexibility/Capacity |
| 2a | High Quality Outcomes – Application processing |
| 2b | High Quality Outcomes – Validation and decision |
| 2c | High Quality Outcomes – Enforcement |
| 3 | Customer Interface |
| 4 | Staff Development |
| 5 | Corporate/Member involvement. |

The actions in 2a, 2b and 2c almost exclusively confined to internal improvements on the way the service operates procedurally.

The actions in 1, 3, 4 and 5 have a more corporate or customer focus, and will largely influence how the service is perceived by the wider community. It is in this area that our focus needs to be directed to first.

Top Priorities for delivery

These are not set out in any particular order of importance, but give a clear indication of the breadth of work that the service needs to do to achieve change.

- Customer care/complaint handling training for staff
- Member training
- Considering additional resources for development monitoring and administration. This will also free up the capacity of the Assistant Head of Planning (Development Control) to manage the service
- Establish quarterly liaison meetings with main residents associations to discuss issues and potential improvements
- Re-write Customer Care Charter to ensure its customer focused (and refer to authority's corporate aims).
- Review and update all information on the website to ensure that it is customer focused and explains in more detail what planning is about and how it works
- Produce a Development Management Service Commitment (DMSC) which defines what the service sets out to do (formally adopted by the Council and publicised). This should shift the emphasis to development monitoring and compliance.
- Comprehensive review of the delegation arrangements "by exceptions" approach.
- Amend Planning Code to enable greater pre-Committee discussion between councillors and officers

MINUTES OF THE CABINET

8 JUNE 2010

PRESENT:

Councillor J.D. Packman (Chairman, Cabinet Member and Leader of the Council);
Councillor R.A. Smith-Ainsley (Deputy Leader of the Council, Vice-Chairman of the Cabinet
and Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing);
Councillor F. Ayers (Cabinet Member for Community Safety);
Councillor G.E. Forsbrey (Cabinet Member for Environment);
Councillor Mrs. V.J. Leighton (Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources) and
Councillor Mrs J.M. Pinkerton (Cabinet Member for Communications); and

Apologies: Councillors S. Bhadye (Cabinet Member for Independent Living), C.A. Davis (Cabinet Member for Economic Development) and Mrs D.L. Grant (Cabinet Member for Young People and Culture)

1609. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE TREVOR ROBERTS ASSOCIATES REVIEW OF THE PLANNING DEPARTMENT

The Cabinet considered an update report on the main recommendations of the TRA review of planning services, and explaining what key decisions needed to be made.

The options considered were in the main body of the report.

RESOLVED:-

1. that Cabinet notes the TRA review, recommendations and key actions.
2. that Cabinet agrees that MAT and a Leader's Monitoring Group oversee monitoring and ensure the effective delivery of the Action Plans arising from the review, and report back to Cabinet (initially on a quarterly basis).