

Update: Review of the Planning Service

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Planning Service Review - Update

- Working to timetable previously agreed at Cabinet Catch-up in October.
- Here today to give an update, highlighting Issues and progress so far
- Further Government consultations out recently on Permitted Development Rights, Infrastructure, etc.
- The Planning System is still going through a huge period of change
- Grateful for the support of Members for what is trying to be achieved in the Bay, but recognition of some of the challenges eg. Housing provision

Reminder of the Vision

- **Objective**

‘To become a more responsive, interventionist, facilitative and positive Planning Service’.

- **Through:**

Change in processes, behaviours, commitment & communication.

- **Outcome**

A better public perception, better feedback, better development, leading to a better Torbay

Recall some of the sub-headings from original presentation:

- Need for Torbay Council Planning Service to be ‘fit for purpose’ in new Planning System
- Set new standards for the quality of development
- Play our important part in the regeneration of our towns.
- Develop a sense of pride in the Service
- Offer an exemplary level of service to our customers and all those involved in the development process.

Development Management 1.

- Team working and performance has suffered from remote working.
- Good practices been introduced to try and help this issue eg. On-line Peer Review, virtual committee, virtual site visits, training
- Secured support from agency staff to cover whilst planning officer posts were advertised, interviewed for and recruited into.
- Now all posts are filled, newest addition starting in 2-3 weeks time.
- Covid-19 cases experienced within the team, losing staff for up to two weeks.

Warning: Our neighbours are attempting to lure staff away with up to £5,000 'Golden Hellos' and higher salaries, it's tough market out there.

Development Management 2.

- Officers still carrying high caseloads, meaning delays in determination and unhappy applicants and agents, this will be addressed, but needs some stability. Regular reminders to the team to keep communicating
- Major cases heading the way of the planning team arising through the *Town Deal & Future High Streets Fund*, would like to ensure quick efficient decisions on these. (Dedicated Officer service?)
- Considering idea of a mini 'team within the team', dealing with design, public realm & historic environment issues. Key priorities.
- Delighted with recent budget proposal for Enforcement, 1 permanent new member of staff and in addition to a 12 month temporary role.

Planning Support 1.

Team

- The Team is struggling and the Manager & Team Leader doing ridiculous hours just to try and keep the ship sailing.
- Validation part of the process, has suffered the most and that is critical at the start and affects determination rates and customer satisfaction levels. Recent Business Process Mapping exercise showed a need for additional resource. Business Case prepared to experiment with outsourcing this element for a trial 6 month period to *Terraquest*, a company linked to the *Planning Portal*.
- Team has had retirement, sickness and absence issues during and outside the Lockdown periods, which has added to pressure and one vacant* post.

Planning Support 2.



Land Charges

- Retirement of Land Charges Officer, but replaced with 2 job-share staff which gives us a bit more resource, but currently being trained up and backlog of cases with Stamp Duty window coming to an end.
- Letter from Housing Minister, pointing out our slower performance adding extra pressure. Agency support.
- Need the establishment of the *Total Land Charges* system in place and then digitisation of the information held by the Council.
- Pay for the new system using reserves.

Planning Support 3.



Section 106/CiL Work

- The officer has been off work for 3 months. Managed to get the required Infrastructure Funding Statement out at the end of last year, but the *Exacom* system still not in place. Awaiting quote from *Exacom's* sister company *Validation Office* to do the set-up and data input work for us and get it established.
- The officer currently doing Validation was employed to do IT installation and development, moving him from Validation to doing what he is skilled to do, will move both *Exacom* and the *Total Land Charges* system on. Outsourcing of the Validation process is key.

Future Planning Team

Review currently underway...but..

- The Team is up to full complement, two new planners.
- Clear on the scope of the Local Plan work
- Suffering with Lockdown and home-schooling challenges
- Finding the Transport element a challenge

...Further work continuing.



Other Actions

Regular liaison meetings established with:

- NHS Partnership Trust
- South Devon College
- Homes England
- Historic England
- Geopark (developing a Planning Protocol)
- Registered Providers (Housing Associations)
- Developers

