

HAMBLETON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Report To: Cabinet
12 June 2012

Subject: **PLANNING SERVICE REVIEW**

**All Wards
Scrutiny Committees
Portfolio Holder for Housing and Planning: Councillor M Robson**

This report is NOT FOR PUBLICATION because of the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972

1.0 PURPOSE:

1.1 To review the structure of the Planning Service and make recommendations about how the service can be organised to deliver customer and Member expectations.

2.0 BACKGROUND:

2.1 Planning is a high profile service for the Council as it directly or indirectly affects a large proportion of the community. Each year several thousand residents can come into contact with the service either as applicants for planning permission, consultees on planning applications or as consultees on planning policy matters. Planning decisions directly affect people's locality and their expectations of the service are rightly high. People's experience of the service may colour their view of the Council overall.

2.2 The Planning Service is also important to delivering the priorities in the Council Business Plan such as:

- The number of new homes built
- The amount of affordable housing provided
- The amount of employment land granted planning permission
- The amount of land for sports and recreation delivered

2.3 To maintain high levels of satisfaction in an environment where expectations are high and increasing requires that we seek to continuously improve the service. The key areas are: the quality of the service, customer focus and customer care, commercial and business awareness, communications with Members, enforcement of breaches of planning control and how responsive planning policy is and how it is applied.

2.4 Coupled with the above is the need to respond positively to the Government's recent reforms to the planning system which seek to facilitate growth and development and foster greater community involvement. These require new ways of working with developers and the community.

2.5 Shortly direct management support and leadership for the service will be reduced with the departure of the Head of Regulatory Services which means there will be less capacity to deal with the issues and challenges described above. There are also other staff changes imminent which will impact on the experience and technical knowledge available in the Technical Support Unit (TSU).

2.6 Annex A sets out in broad terms what the Council should be seeking to achieve on each of the key issues and what action it needs to take. Some of the issues can be dealt with by changing the way we do things and by staff training but some require a structural change to the way the service is organised or additional capacity.

3.0 THE PROPOSAL:

3.1 The current separate structures for Development Management and Planning Policy are shown in Annex B. A new structure for the whole of the Planning Service is proposed which is illustrated in Annex C. The main changes from the current structure are:

- A new Planning Manager focused exclusively on managing the whole Planning Service able to provide greater management support and leadership for the service.
- Additional resources for Enforcement (0.5 fte)
- Merging the Planning Technical Support Unit (TSU) with Land Charges to strengthen support for the TSU and technical knowledge of its shared systems.
- Bringing Development Management and Planning Policy under a single manager to strengthen the links between Planning Policy and implementation.

3.2 The additional resource for Enforcement (0.5 fte) may not be sufficient to meet the aim of a more pro-active and responsive Enforcement Service. However, this can be returned to in the context of a wider consideration of Council priorities and resources where it can be looked at alongside any other requirements.

3.3 No changes are proposed to the number of planning officers dealing with applications as this is not justified by current application numbers. However, the ratio of applications to officers will be kept under review as the economy picks up to ensure the service to customers does not decline.

3.4 The Planning Shared Services are to be reviewed, but the changes proposed in this report are necessary whatever the outcome. The structure in Annex B works for both shared and separate services. If the changes are implemented as part of the shared service they would require the agreement of RDC and a sharing of the costs.

4.0 DECISION SOUGHT:

4.1 To support the proposed structure.

5.0 LINK TO CORPORATE PRIORITIES:

5.1 An effective and efficient Planning Service is important to delivering a range of corporate objectives (see paragraph 2.2).

6.0 RISK ASSESSMENT

6.1 Risk in approving the recommendation(s)

Risk	Implication	Prob*	Imp*	Total	Preventative action
More pro-active Enforcement places pressure on resources in the Legal Section	Need for additional resources in the Legal Section	4	3	12	Review resources
Additional resources of 0.5 fte for Enforcement may not be sufficient	Service does not meet expectations	4	3	12	Review resources

6.2 Risk in not approving the recommendation(s)

Risk	Implication	Prob*	Imp*	Total	Preventative action
Less management support and capacity to deal with issues	Quality of service declines	5	4	20	Implement the proposals
Capacity in the TSU is not sufficient	Quality of service declines	5	3	15	Implement the proposals
Capacity in Enforcement is not sufficient	Unacceptable level of enforcement	5	4	20	Implement the proposals

Prob = Probability, Imp = Impact, Score range is Low = 1, High = 5

7.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS AND EFFICIENCIES:

7.1 The cost of the proposals in a full year is £68,500 however service savings of £12,000 have been identified. Also £35,000 of additional management savings have been identified which could be applied to the funding of the new establishment. It is expected that the new structure will be in place by 1 September and therefore the financial implications of the proposals are:

	2012/13 £	2013/14 £	2014/15 £	2015/16 £
Cost of the Changes	39,960	68,500	68,500	69,500
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Less:				
Service Savings available	-12,000	-12,000	-12,000	-12,000
Management Savings available	-29,170	-35,000	-35,000	-35,000
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Surplus/Shortfall	+1,210	-21,500	-21,500	-21,500
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7.2 From 2014/15 there is a shortfall in funding of £21,500 to be found from the Revenue Budget which will impact on the budget outlook as follows:

	2012/13 £	2013/14 £	2014/15 £	2015/16 £
Expected Revenue Budget Surplus	76,420	135,810	67,070	114,480
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Cost of Staffing Structure	+1,210	-21,500	-21,500	-21,500
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Revised Surplus	77,630	114,310	45,570	92,980
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7.3 If the new structure is shared RDC would pay a proportion of the costs (approximately 40%), if not Hambleton would pay the entire costs. It is assumed here that Hambleton will pay the full costs.

8.0 RECOMMENDATION:

8.1 It is recommended that:

- 1) the revised structure for the Planning Service as detailed in Annex C to the report be approved, and
- 2) the funding for the post be approved.

MICK JEWITT

Background papers: None

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PLANNING SERVICE REVIEW

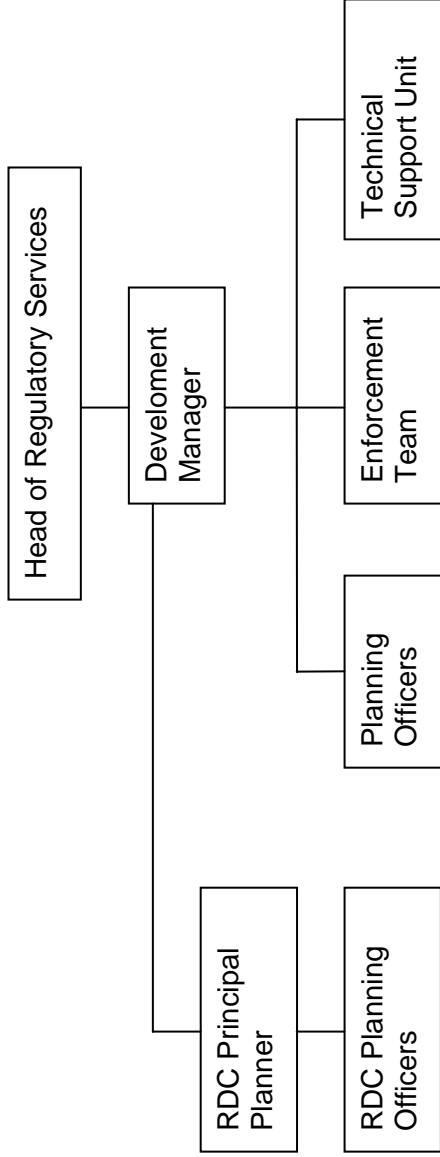
ANALYSIS OF THE ISSUES

Key Issues	Aim	Possible Actions	
		Structure	Management
1. Quality of Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To be viewed as an excellent Planning Service ▪ The Planning Service is held in high regard by the community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Strong leadership ▪ Increase management resources to provide focus on quality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Focus on becoming an excellent service ▪ Officer training
2. Customer Focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increase positive feedback from customers about the service and reduce negative feedback ▪ Most of the community agrees the service is excellent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Strong leadership ▪ Increase management resources to provide focus on the customer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Emphasis on improving customer care/customer focus by officer training, cultural change in the service etc
3. Commercial and Business Awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Planning supports the growth of the local economy ▪ Most businesses agree the service is excellent ▪ Hambleton renowned for being “business friendly” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Strong leadership ▪ Increase management resources to provide focus on businesses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Improve officers commercial and business awareness by training ▪ Minimise delays in the planning process for businesses ▪ Improve support at pre-application stage for businesses
4. Communication with Members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Members feel well informed about what’s happening with planning applications in their Wards ▪ Improved communication with Members 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Inform Members about pre-application discussions ▪ Inform Members about enforcement issues ▪ Officers sensitive to pressures on Members
5. Enforcement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ More pro-active and responsive enforcement ▪ More capacity to deal with breaches of planning control 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increased resources for Enforcement ▪ Increase management support for Enforcement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The profile and priority of Enforcement is increased ▪ Produce Local Enforcement Plan – to give direction

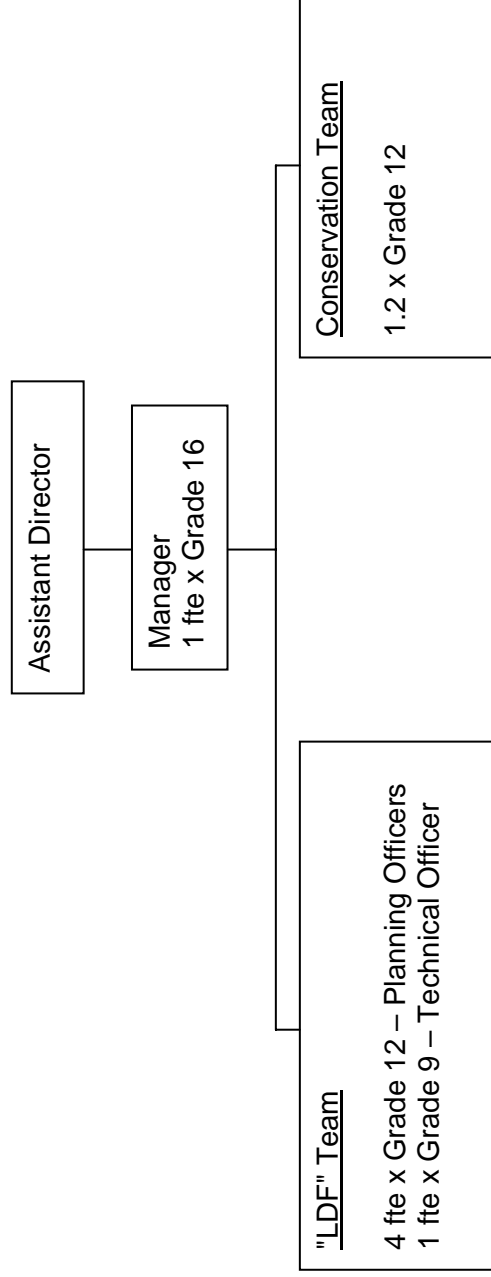
Key Issues	Aim	Possible Actions	
		Structure	Management
6. Shared Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ensure HDC gets value for money from Shared Service ▪ Shared Service delivers efficiencies and required quality ▪ 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Monitor use of resources/quality in shared service ▪ Review shared service
7. Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Decision making follows policy ▪ Members have a good understanding of policy ▪ Policy is up-to-date, relevant to the community and supported ▪ Policy is responsive to local needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Bring Development Management and Planning Policy Services closer together 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Firm/clear policy advice to Planning Committee ▪ Member and Officer training ▪ Improved links to Planning Policy ▪ Review Planning policies

CURRENT STRUCTURE

1. Development Management



2. Planning Policy



INTEGRATED PLANNING SERVICE

