

Best Value Review of Planning Services

Executive Summary

Part 1

Introduction

The Best Value Review of Planning Services is part of the IW Council's review programme for 2002/03. It began in November 2002 and was aimed at the whole Planning Service which consists of the following areas:

- Development Control
- County Archaeology Service
- Building Control
- AONB
- Planning Policy
- Countryside

The review was undertaken as a result of identified performance issues in the Development Control section, the need for a service review following the appointment of a new head of service, and the public perception that 'Planning' was failing, as expressed by elected members and some stakeholders. It was also highlighted in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) as an area for improvement.

The review was carried out between November 2002 and September 2003 culminating in the consideration of the improvement plan by its stakeholders and the IWC Executive in October 2003.

The Improvement Plan – part III of this Executive Summary, will be incorporated into the Planning Services departmental plans, and these will be reviewed and monitored by Members and Officers of the Council through their lifetime, to help ensure that the improvements are implemented successfully.

The review was conducted by members of the Council's Best Value Team and a project officer from the Planning service, by means of two main steering / contact groups. The first group consisted of elected members and a Unison Representative, and this Appraisal Group was instrumental in agreeing the overall scope of the review and steering the review. The second group, the Project Team consisted of officers from the service together with the lead Member and the Best Value Team and project officer. Customer consultation was undertaken by the Best Value team members and sought to involve all parties interested in the Planning process, both internal and external. Documentation relating to the processes undertaken during the review can be examined in the Appendices at the end of the main report.

The Issues

The Improvement Plan necessarily concentrates on the areas where the review has found potential for improvement, which will lead to a more customer focussed, understandable, and well managed, service. It is appropriate however to begin this report by highlighting the fact that the service has a dedicated staff and elected members, who all work hard to provide the local community with a good Planning service under increasing pressure. The number of planning applications has increased from 2,100pa to 2,600pa (an increase of 23% over the last two years). In addition, there has been increased public awareness and consultation due to more openness shown by the Planning Service (eg public speaking at Development Control Committee). There is a commitment to change, and this was shown by the willingness of all concerned to participate in the review and open themselves to new ideas and challenges.

The service already has a good record of partnership working, it is improving in terms of performance indicators, despite increased workload, and has recently undergone an Investors in People assessment with positive results. There is a change of culture taking place which will enable the service to move forward and face the challenges of the future, and therefore the recommendations that follow should be seen in a positive light which will further improve the service for customers, members and staff alike.

The main issues which were identified in the review were :

The service as a whole and it's individual components was not fully understood by all stakeholders, nor did the service offer clear easily accessible customer focussed charters and protocols. As a result the expectations of users of the service did not match the actual service being provided, leading to a lack of trust and confidence.

There were performance problems particularly in respect of Development Control turn around figures on Major Planning applications and to a lesser extent with other applications.

Public consultation had identified inconsistency as an issue both in terms of the decision making process, and pre-application advice.

That although generally member / officer relationships were positive, some member / officer relationships were not as good as they could be, and probity was an issue questioned by external stakeholders of the Planning service.

Stakeholders did not regard planning as a 'seamless' service, and internally there were issues relating to the relationship of sections to one another.

The aims and goals of the Enforcement section needed to be clarified for elected members and the general public, and a closer working relationship with the Building Control section developed..

The service was not seen to be furthering Corporate goals through the use of Section106 Agreements.

The Development Control Committee was not as focussed and business like as it should be, and there were hearing and visual problems in the Council Chamber.

There was a lack of clarity, which was possibly linked to the service being too inward looking and reactive, rather than pro-actively taking issues and information out to the public.

Part II

The Vision

The vision for Planning is to provide a service, via the Local Development Framework, which ensures that the future sustainable use of land on the Island is based around community needs. The service provided will be fast and efficient, and will be one which keeps the public involved and well informed.

In overall terms the Service will have three main targets for short, medium and long term service provision:

- Will meet the Government Standard for major applications by March 2004.
- Will have a Local Development Framework in place by December 2006,
- Meet all of the criteria in the Excellence Matrix of the Planning Officers Society by the end of 2007.

Priorities within the improvement plan will therefore be the speed of processing applications (including the development team approach), the development of better information for Members and the general public, and improved access to the service, particularly electronically.

Aims and Objectives

The plan incorporates the main themes of the Audit Commission's paper on improving Planning services which sets out five key aims for such improvement as follows :

Focussing on what matters to local people
Assuring the quality of development
Enhancing Customer Care
Reducing the delay in Development Control
Reinforcing management systems to assure quality

In addition to the above, there is a section of specific service improvements, which have been identified as a result of the review. In line with the improved management culture of the service, each of the following improvements will be monitored.

The improvement plan, (part III of this report), details all of the tasks to be undertaken and allocates agreed timescales and adequate resource to complete the objectives listed. The items listed under "what we will do" will be referred to specific tasks which can be monitored in the improvement plan. Those task numbers will be shown within the [] brackets, when the improvement plan has been finalised and agreed.

Focussing on what matters to local people



Evidence from the review showed that the IW Council is not consistent in its approach to Section 106 Agreements with applicants, and does not make the best use of them in line with policy to “Improve Island Life”.

What we want to achieve :

To greatly increase the Island’s gain from Section 106 Agreements in line with Corporate objectives.

What we will do :

	Item No.
Train officers and Members on awareness	[]
Develop and implement a strategy for obtaining corporate gain from Sec.106 Agreements which includes a protocol & PI’s	[]
Establish system for monthly updates of Sec.106 Agreements	[]
Agree financial monitoring processes for income from Sec.106 Agreements	[]
Produce supplementary planning guidance on specific sites linked to Sec106 agreements	[]
Ensure clear reporting mechanism to committee regarding Sec106 agreements	[]
Produce a standard template for legal agreements	[]
Improve the provision of legal services	[]



The Local Development Framework (LDF), as a replacement for the Unitary Development Plan (UDP), has been identified as one of the issues which will have a major impact on the Planning Service for several reasons.

- First it will play a crucial role in the way in which the Planning Service enables large areas of the Community Plan and Corporate aspirations to be implemented.
- Second, it will affect the way policy decisions are made and implemented.
- Third it will impact upon the quality of decision making at Development Control level, whereby clear and concise policies and Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) will speed up decision making, and contribute to the submission of higher standards of application. The LDF will be directly linked to the service’s Planning Delivery Grant allocation in future years

What do we want to achieve?

To produce a more responsive policy framework for the Island.

What we will do :

Item No.

- | | |
|--|-----|
| Allocate sufficient staff resource and budget to produce the plan | [] |
| Develop a strategy document identifying the key stages and key consultees in order to produce the plan | [] |
| Implement the plan to produce a Local Development Framework by 2006 | [] |



Enforcement was identified as an area where there was no clear policy for the section to work to. Members stated, that there needed to be a clearer message sent out, that unauthorised development would be tackled firmly and consistently by the Council. There was a need to ensure the section had clear information available for customers, both in paper and electronic form. Other issues identified were the potential role for the Building Control Section to contribute to the Enforcement role especially in terms of site inspections, and the need for a protocol or service level agreement between the section and Legal Services who provide technical support. Too much Enforcement time is taken inspecting all conditional approvals.

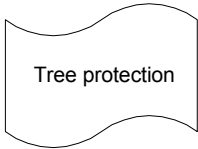
What do we want to achieve?

Rigorously pursue breaches of Planning law & increase public awareness.
Enable a clearer understanding of the section's role by all stakeholders.
Better linkages between the Enforcement section, the Building Control Section & the Legal Services section, leading to greater efficiency, and a more seamless service.
A more focussed section leading to a quicker more effective service.

What we will do:

Item No.

- | | |
|--|-----|
| Develop an Enforcement Policy which will incorporate current Government Guidance | [] |
| Identify priorities for the section | [] |
| Produce clear guidelines for stakeholders & a customer charter which adopts the recommendations of the nationally agreed Enforcement Concordat | [] |
| Develop stronger links with the Building Control section to enable mutual working | [] |
| Inspect conditional approval sites on a 'risk' basis only | [] |
| Delegate the authority to officers to authorise the serving of Enforcement Notices | [] |
| Ensure performance against local PI's is monitored and reported to committee | [] |
| Improve the provision of legal services | [] |



Some 80% of Tree Protection Orders(TPO) currently in force have been assessed as inadequate, and many are unenforceable. As well as potential liability for compensation arising from incomplete information about protection being available to landowners, there is considerable pressure from members and the public to show that

- a) We are committed to enforcing the protection we currently maintain, and
- b) We are properly able to make and implement new TPO's when necessary. Although there have been considerable improvements and investment in the service much remains to be done, and poor public image will take some time to put right.

What we want to achieve:

The provision and promotion of an effective tree protection section service

What we will do:

	Item No.
Streamline the processes to enable new TPO's to be set up more quickly	[]
Re-examine the TPO review, already approved by members, with a view to finding alternative resources for implementation	[]
Recruit a TPO Review Officer	[]
Employ expert tree contractors to facilitate prosecution and enforcement	[]
Provide an efficient tree advice service	[]
Standardise procedures for enforcement of TPO breaches	[]
Agree SLA with Legal Services and or consider alternative sources of legal advice	[]



Planning Services has had a somewhat limited and inconsistent approach to consultation and public involvement. It has carried out statutory consultation well, such as on planning applications and on the UDP, but in some areas does little proactive work beyond that.

What we want to achieve:

For Members, Town and Parish Councils, special interest groups and the general public to be effectively involved in both the development of the service and the decision making process.

What we will do:

	Item No.
Develop user groups with whom we will consult on a regular basis, including a Planning Services Advisory Group, Agents forum, & Architects panel	[]
Establish a regular meeting with Town & Parish Councils to discuss their involvement.	[]
Provide better information	[]

Assuring the quality of development



There is a recognised need for the service to be more customer focussed, being clear and consistent in its advice and guidance.

What do we want to achieve? :

Enable applicants to understand the service and give them clear information which will improve the service to the customer, the speed of processing of applications, lead to higher quality submissions, and better understanding of processes, and thus achieve quality outcomes.

What we will do :

Item No.

Design & implement a protocol & checklist for Development Control (DC) & Building Control (BC) officers on pre-application advice.	[]
Upgrade the web site information with Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) & application /general guidance	[]
Integrate with the Great Access to Great Services system (GAGS)	[]
Design and implement a Customer Care Charter for the service	[]
Train staff	[]
Ensure all advice given by officers is recorded for future reference	[]
Establish a development team as a single point of contact, involving all relevant parties, both internal and external	[]
Ensure applicants are aware of Sec106 requirements	[]
Establish a Customer Care Team as a first point of contact	[]



There is currently a shortage of written guidance for developers and DC staff enabling detailed interpretation of existing policies

What do we want to achieve

Better information for developers and DC staff to enable worthwhile pre-application negotiation.

What we will do	Item No.
Identify areas where Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) is necessary	[]
Allocate resource / budget to the production of SPG	[]
Prepare SPG	[]
Identify priority sites where development briefs are required	[]
Allocate resource / budget to production of briefs	[]
Prepare development briefs	[]



Members, both individually, and through the Development Control Committee (DCC), play a crucial role in the Planning process. It is vital that they are seen to be knowledgeable, informed, and impartial, and that they carry out their quasi judicial role on the DCC in a professional manner. This is not always seen to be the case. Furthermore, it is important that the DCC is easily accessible, open, and understandable.

Member and officer relationships within the service need to be more positive and productive with everyone aiming towards the same goal of a transparent, easily accessible, high quality service.

What we want to achieve :

- That the public can see, hears, and understands what happens at DCC
- That the public have trust and confidence in the process
- Members and officers in all areas of the service understand and respect each others roles, and work together in a consistent way.
- Members have a mechanism by which they can influence which projects are undertaken and follow the progress of those projects.

What we will do:	Item No.
Carry out improvements to the physical facilities where DCC is held	[]
Investigate alternate venues for DCC	[]
Agree a plain English set of rules for members to adhere to	[]
Raise awareness among members & Officers of the existing Code of Conduct in the Constitution	[]
Ensure that each section has a prioritised list of projects which is available to members	[]
Continue the member training programme	[]
Prepare a quarterly report to all members on effectiveness of training	[]



Better quality of outcomes was identified as a goal by stakeholders, members and staff . Quality of outcome can be seen when high quality decisions are the norm, enabling such aspects as good design and sustainability to be attained

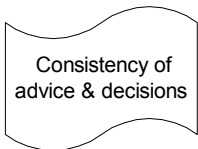
What we want to achieve

A service which is known for its ability to deliver quality decisions which benefit the community.

What we will do

Item No.

We will promote good quality design within the community by instigating an annual design award scheme	[]
Train staff and Elected members in design / sustainability issues	[]
Revisit decisions, assess them, & thereby amend policies and procedures	[]
Promote better quality applications via the Agents & Architects Group	[]
Provide better quality pre-application advice	[]
Produce SPG, Development Briefs	[]
Establish Conservation and Design team	[]
Via the Enforcement section, monitor compliance with agreed plans	[]
Designate an elected member as Design Champion	[]



Consistency of advice and decisions has been identified as an area where the service can improve and thereby enhance stakeholders perception of the service.

What we want to achieve

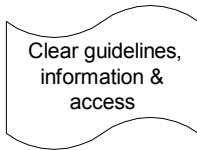
A service, which is recognised as being fair, impartial, and consistent.

What we will do

Item No.

Train officers and members in all of the areas in which they give advice or make decisions	[]
Revisit decisions to ensure they are consistent & question where they are not	[]
Ensure all advice given by officers is recorded for future reference	[]
Revise scheme of delegation to establish objective criteria for reporting applications to committee.	[]
Make full use of the GAGS / Customer Relations Management (CRM) system	[]

Enhancing Customer care



Knowledge and understanding of the whole range of Planning Services is not good on the Island. There are perceptions that parts of it are inwardly focused, and not transparent. Some of the information supplied is very good, but some is inconsistent, difficult to understand, and not always widely available. Access to the service (other than for Archaeology) is limited to the one site at Seaclose, but is recognised as being good. There are occasional problems at peak times, with limited access to certain officers.

What we want to achieve:

A better understanding by Members, Town and Parish Councils and the general public, of the various roles of Planning Services, and how they are carried out.

An increase in trust in the overall process.

What we will do:

Item No.

Provide a wide range of information about what services are provided and why, how to apply for those services, and how to influence any decision making	[]
Provide information in plain English, easily available on the web and leaflets and guides, and available in a range of formats and languages.	[]
Produce a Customer Charter for each section of the service laying-out what the public can expect from us, and what we would want from them.	[]
Continue training for Members and Town & Parish Councils, & arrange public seminars	[]
In conjunction with the Great Access to Great Services project we will expand the availability of access to the Service.	[]
Improve the Planning services input into the Council's Web site	[]
Establish Customer Care Team as first point of contact	[]
Refurbish reception area	[]
Examine the need for site notices on all Planning applications	[]
Form User Groups	[]
Instigate an understandable complaints procedure	[]
Develop guidance for business	[]



Access to the service is difficult, because it is not a seamless service.

What we want to achieve

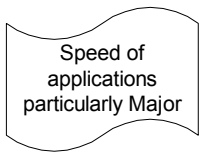
A single service and not a collection of technical disciplines which just happen to be under one roof .

What we will do

Item No.

- Develop links and support between sections []
- Building Control, DC, and Enforcement sections to assist one another []
- Use in house expertise regarding ground stability rather than consultants []
- Provide improved customer access to the service as a whole []
- Establish a development team []
- Establish Customer Care team as first point of contact []

Reducing delay in Development Control



The Council has been cited last year for its failure to achieve satisfactory speed of determination on major applications. A standard of 50% of major applications to be determined within 13 weeks has been set for the year April 2003 to 2004. The current level of performance so far this year is 69%, a sizeable increase from 42.5% achieved in 2002/03.

What we want to achieve:

- Meet the Governments National Performance Indicator (PI) target for major applications during 2004/05 of 60%.
- Higher levels of customer service
- A more efficient service

What we will do :

Item No.

- Set up a development team approach []
- Rearrangement of DC team structure. []
- Recruit additional staff []
- Provide better information re Council's expectations of developers. []
- Provide more robust pre application advice []
- Agree a template for legal agreements []
- Improve the provision of legal services. []

Draw up SPG for development sites.	[]
Set up monitoring procedure for major applications	[]
Develop Service Level Agreements (SLA) with internal and external consultees	[]
Improve consultee processes	[]
Re-engineer work processes	[]

Reinforce management systems to assure quality



Planning Services has found difficulty in recruiting and retaining professional planning staff, leading to a poorer quality service for stakeholders and the inability to meet Government targets. Planning Services had to advertise for 7 people this summer to fill budgeted posts.

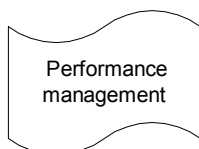
What we want to achieve:

The recruitment and retention of sufficient suitably qualified and experienced staff to enable the provision of a 1st class service.

What we will do:

Item No.

Develop a 'golden handshake' graduate scheme for IWC Planning Service.	[]
Enhance training for managers & staff through Personal Performance Reviews (PPR).	[]
Carry out exit interviews and staff for feedback on service improvement	[]
Encourage flexible working arrangements.	[]
Make the IWC Planning Service an attractive career option for staff.	[]
Look at ways of ensuring pay and conditions are competitive with other Authorities including performance related pay.	[]
Make use of consultants where necessary	[]
Take advantage of the Corporate Human Resources Strategy	[]
Continue with current work on Investors In People	[]
Involve and communicate with staff on all potential developments	[]
Regularly review staffing levels to align with the service plan	[]



Overall the Planning service has the potential to develop further its performance management culture.

What we want to achieve:

Higher levels of performance through establishing a culture of performance management.

What we will do:

Item No.

Produce a performance management plan, with the development of local PI's	[]
Measure progress of improvement and adjust business plan accordingly	[]
Ensure information used is consistent and accurate	[]
Use the Best Value Improvement Plan as the basis for the Service Plan	[]
Play an active part in New Unitaries Benchmarking group, and monitor best practice	[]
Allocate resources to priority areas	[]



The service is perceived as being too inward looking and re-active and not sufficiently customer focussed.

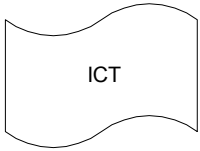
What we want to achieve:

An active and leading role in external and internal cross cutting projects.
Effective communication with stakeholders.
Improve staff ability and commitment to change the culture
A closer liaison with the local media

What we will do

Item No.

Set up a Development Team approach for developers to engage in new project ideas.	[]
Ensure the public has access to Planning matters through GAGS	[]
Achieve Investors In People (IIP) status by the end of 2003	[]
Provide helpful customer orientated advice.	[]
Review protocols with major stakeholders in the Planning Service.	[]
Implement an effective consultation system with all its major stakeholders	[]
Ensure staff involvement and support in all service development.	[]
Develop a media strategy	[]
Develop strategies for serial complainants	[]
Develop Project Management as a management skill	[]



Information Communication Technology (ICT) and its effective use is essential to the existing and the developing service. It was seen by both members and officers as fundamental to service improvement and the future of the Planning Service.

What we want to achieve

To develop a strategy for ICT within the Planning Service which not only ensures quality service delivery, but which enables the ICT Department to provide timely support and assistance, in line with the Corporate aims and objectives and central governments targets for electronic service delivery.

What we will do

Item No.

Produce and adopt an ICT strategy for the service.

[]

Section specific improvements



A new Conservation & Design section are to be established in the Policy team, and it is important that they develop their new role as well as retaining strong links with the Development Control team

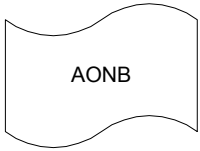
What we want to achieve

A more proactive, focussed, and understood Conservation & Design Service.

What we will do

Item No

- Agree a protocol with all relevant sections for early consultation on applications likely to involve Conservation or design matters []
- Set up a design award scheme []
- Village Design statements will be formally adopted []
- Establish a set of Performance Indicators, and monitor []
- Produce an Historic Environment policy document []
- Develop a strategy for the Historic Environment []
- Develop and adopt Conservation Area Appraisals []
- Produce SPG []



The Areas Of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) section is undergoing a consultation exercise on it's management plan and developing its role promoting and enhancing the AONB.

What we want to achieve

The production of an AONB Management Plan

What we will do

Item No

Develop performance indicators & monitor these.

[]



The County Archaeology Service plays an important role in the protection of the historic environment through the local planning process. At present there is no specialist planning archaeologist post dedicated to the provision of this advice. The Island does not have an up to date County Research Framework to provide the strategic context for all decisions about archaeological resource, and the Council has no Historic Environment Strategy with which it can inform its elected members, officers, and other stakeholders.

What we want to achieve

The role of the Service within the Development Control process and its wider responsibilities must be clarified for elected members, officers and the public.

The operational and strategic mechanisms should be put into place to improve the Service's contribution to the management of the historic environment.

What we will do

Item No.

Define the role and procedures of the service in the planning process

[]

Determine performance indicators and monitor these.

[]

Produce an Historic Environment Strategy to inform elected members, officers and other stakeholders.

[]

Produce a County Research Framework which will provide strategic guidance on all decisions about the archaeological resource.

[]



What we want to achieve

Continuous service improvement and a wider understanding of the services role.

What we will do

Item No

- Produce a Policy statement for the section []
- Agree input into the Development Control & Enforcement process []
- Develop performance indicators for the section & monitor []
- Review all procedures and refine them []
- Set up a BC user group []



The role of the section needs to be clarified for the public and elected members.

What we want to achieve

The provision and promotion of an effective and integrated Countryside Service

What we will do

Item No.

- Draw up a Countryside Strategy. []
- Develop local performance indicators for the section, and monitor. []
- Develop links with the Education Department. []
- Input into an Open Space Strategy for the Island. []
- Develop a procedure for meeting the new statutory obligations for managing SSSI's owned by the Council. []
- Develop a wider role on crime and disorder issues. []

Resource Bid Summary for the Improvement Plan

The following table shows the additional resources required for this Improvement Plan.
The table is also contained within the Service Plan for 2004/05

Reference Number	Description	Financial Implications		
		2004/5 £000	2005/6 £000	2006/7 £000
1.	Section 106 Officer (post could become self financing via recharge to 106 agreements)	30	32	34
2.	Tree Admin Officer/External contracts	25	27	29
3.	Major Applications Officer (Post agreed in 2003, but currently funded by Supplementary Planning Grant)	35	37	40
4.	Costs of production of Local Development Framework over and above base budget staff costs, (escalating costs reflect : First year likely consultants costs Second year consultation and initial production costs Third year inquiry costs Need for Research Asst post Based upon costs of UDP production and inquiry)	70	125	225
5.	Scanning assistant for DIP	17	18	19
6.	Additional Building Control Officer	25	27	29
Total	Total Planning Services	202	266	376