

REPORT TO: DEVELOPMENT QUALITY COMMITTEE - 18 JUNE 2007

REPORT ON: PERFORMANCE INDICATORS FOR DEVELOPMENT QUALITY 2006/2007

REPORT BY: DIRECTOR OF PLANNING & TRANSPORTATION

REPORT NO: 220-2007

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The report outlines aspects of Development Quality performance for the year 2006/2007 in relation to Scottish Executive targets and Key Performance Indicators from the Planning and Transportation Service Plan 2004-2007.

2 RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Committee
- a Notes the trends in performance of the Development Quality service.
 - b Reaffirms the approach to quality of planning decision making as its predominant requirement while at the same time seeking the adoption of any measures which will increase the speed of decision and whilst otherwise further improving the standard of service to customers and the service.
 - c Acknowledges the major challenge which the DQ service faces in maintaining present levels of performance in the face of the issues raised in this report.
 - d Authorises the Director of Planning and Transportation to review the levels and management of resources in the context of the present and likely future workload of the development quality service and in relation to implementation of the Planning Etc (Scotland) Act and to report to Committee with recommendations.

3 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 There are no financial implications associated with this report.

4 SUSTAINABILITY POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 Although there are no sustainability policy issues directly arising from this report, the Council should be aware that environmental issues are becoming more and more relevant as material planning considerations. These are new and complex areas for applicants, agents and officers to thoroughly discharge. This is having a progressive adverse impact on application processing timescales.

5 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There are no equal opportunities implications of relevance to this report.

6 BACKGROUND

- 6.1 Reference is made to the Minutes of the Development Quality Committee of 24 April 2006 (Report 256-2006 refers). That report contained aspects of Development Quality Service performance for the years 2002/2003 to 2005/2006.
- 6.2 This report outlines performance trends in relation to key performance targets drawing on 6 monthly returns made to the Scottish Executive over the period 2003/2004 to 2006/2007.
- 6.3 Separate reports have been prepared for Committee in relation to appeals, enforcement and tree preservation activity and may be found elsewhere on this agenda. These reports should be read in conjunction with this report.

7 COMMENTARY ON PERFORMANCE AND TRENDS

- 7.1 Annex I tabulates performance trends against the various relevant key indicators over the period 2006/2007 in comparison with previous years. For comparative purposes, where available, the Scottish average for each indicator is provided. Activity trends are also illustrated with reference to statistics for planning and related applications received and determined.
- 7.2 The main issues which have impacted from the performance trends are as follows:

- a Increasing Caseloads of Applications Received

2006/2007 has been a particularly challenging year in this respect. 13.6% more applications were received this year compared to 2005/2006, with the period of April - September 2006 showing a significant 25% increase over the previous six month period.

- b Balance to be Achieved Between Delegated and Committee Referred Applications

In 2004/2005 84.6% of all planning applications were determined under powers delegated to the Director. This has fallen to the figure of 78% in 2006/2007. This figure is approximately 10% lower than any of the other Scottish Cities with which we benchmark (in the period from April - September 2006, Dundee's figures had dropped to 66%).

These figures are a result of increasing numbers of applications of all types (especially householder applications) which have to be determined by Committee, frequently as the result of attracting a single relevant objection. Monthly cycles of Committee and the preparation work involved rarely means that the determination of a Committee Agenda item occurs within the statutory 2 month period on which the key performance indicators are based. This pattern of decision making is compounded by insufficient officer time being able to be devoted to the delegatable applications and non-application work, both of which must be set aside for Committee deadlines to be met. This pattern has been compounded during 2006/2007 by vastly increased workloads and staffing issues.

Later in this report the implications of the new Planning Act are referred to. In due course the Council in future reports will be required to consider making fundamental changes to its decision making procedures in respect of planning applications in support of planning's modernising agenda.

Looking forward to the period from the end of April 2007 to August 2007, only 2 Development Quality Committee's will be held during this period due to the elections and the summer recess. Over 40 undecided applications from an outstanding caseload of approximately 290 applications at the time of preparing this report will have to be decided by Committee. The implications for key performance targets in the period up to September 2007 are clear.

c Engagement with Applicants/Agents and the General Public

Planning authorities are encouraged to engage in pre-application discussions with applicants and agents. In theory this should result in better quality applications and speedier decisions. In reality this process is time consuming and often disproportionate to the amount of added value which results.

Agents frequently amend plans during processing whilst projects already approved are frequently subject to later amendments.

The growing complexity of planning is placing additional demands on applicants to provide technical information before an application can be determined eg contaminated land assessments. These reports require time consuming evaluations from within the Council. Delays in processing applications and in issuing decisions can result.

The speed of determining an application can be assisted by the imposition of conditions only for officer time to be increasingly deflected to the task of receiving, considering and deciding on the information sought and in enforcing these conditions. A difficult balancing act needs to be undertaken

The service continues to provide a free and accessible advice function to Dundee citizens. This workload too is growing as the public's interest in planning grows and as more of our information and activities become accessible on-line.

d Staff Resources/Staffing Changes/Illness

Overall staffing levels are now relatively constant following team changes, recruitment of replacement staff and team reorganisations during the year to reflect departmental policy of rotating professional staff for training and experience purposes. It will be noted from the appendix that the caseload per officer continues to increase compared to the national average. The outturn figures for 2006/2007 include below average performance figures for each month of the period December 2006 - March 2007 inclusive. Over this period the team suffered unusually high levels of staff illness during a period of sustained increases in workload, resulting in an inevitable decline in the numbers of applications determined.

e E-Planning and Electronic Document Management

Since January 2004 a structured programme of work in pursuit of on-line development quality functions has been implemented. Familiarisation, training and the adjustment of back office systems has been a significant commitment this year and this too has impacted on processing timescales, as has the significantly increased amount of administrative work involved. Long term benefits, however, should accrue.

f Planning Appeals and Inquiries

A separate Committee report outlines recent appeal performance against key departmental performance indicators. Two Public Inquiries will take place in May and June 2007 and statutory timescales for the work related to these have the biggest impact during March and April.

g Road Construction Consents

Annex 2 outlines recent performance together with influencing factors. The improved performance for 2005/2006 has been maintained despite the significant increase in the number of applications received.

h Section 75 Agreements During 2006/2007, 7 Section 75 agreements were concluded with a further 13 in hand. This has mostly resulted from the Council's policy in relation to the control of houses in multiple occupation. Application decision times are therefore extended greatly by legal negotiations and apply further downward pressure on Key Performance Indicators.

i Implications of the Environmental Agenda

Increasingly, the Department is finding that a wide range of environmental issues are becoming significant material considerations in the planning process (eg contaminated land, air quality, noise) and in the future certain categories of application will have to be assessed in respect of their carbon emissions. These requirements are already placing a strain on the Development Quality Service and the expert support given to it by the Environmental Health and Trading Standards Department. These pressures on applicants, agents and the Council are likely to intensify.

8 NEW PLANNING ETC (SCOTLAND) ACT - IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE DECISION-MAKING

- 8.1 The content of the new Planning Act will have significant implications for how the Council undertakes its decision making responsibilities in respect of planning applications in the future.
- 8.2 Although the Council approach in this regard includes mechanisms for significant public involvement, the Act includes many areas of activity where this must become a requirement for all Councils.
- 8.3 In terms of improving performance the requirement to review the Scheme of Delegation and the introduction of revised appeals procedures are likely to have the greatest impact. Councils are being encouraged to introduce wider delegated

powers to officers in an effort to reduce the burden on elected members of deciding large quantities of relatively small scale applications and to redirect their involvement to larger scale complete applications which generate a substantial body of objections or are significant departures from the Development Plan. This approach is to be complemented by a revised appeals process where a local Review Body may be asked to review a case where delegated powers have led to a refusal. These applications which continue to fall to be determined by elected members in Committee may be appealed to Scottish Ministers as at present.

- 8.4 The implications for the Council's decision making performance will very much depend on the revision it will make to its decision making procedures in response to the requirements of the Act and on the resources required to carry these through.
- 8.5 Further reports to Committee on these and related issues will follow in the near future as draft secondary legislation is published and further advice from the Scottish Executive is received.

9 CONCLUSION

- 9.1 The performance figures are set against consistently increasing application and non-application workloads, and is a barometer of investment trends throughout the City. Regardless of the influences noted above and, in particular, the Council's acknowledgement of the importance of quality of decision and the need to maintain a high level of service delivery offered to citizens, developers, applicants, agents, the Council has historically maintained levels of performance comparable to Scottish average standards and with its city benchmarking partners. However, the Committee is asked to acknowledge that increasing workload pressures, ever increasing expectations on performance from applicants, agents, the general public and the Scottish Executive coupled with the ever increasing complexity of the planning process and the need for accuracy, it will be increasingly difficult to maintain current performance with the resources presently available to the Development Quality Team.
- 9.2 The new Planning Act will bring further changes which will influence decision making patterns. It is considered, therefore, that it is now appropriate to undertake a comprehensive review of the workload/responsibilities/resources balance within the Development Quality Service in response to the issues raised in this report and in the light of the implications of the new Planning Act.

10 CONSULTATIONS

- 10.1 The Chief Executive, Depute Chief Executive (Support Services), Depute Chief Executive (Finance) and Assistant Chief Executive (Community Planning) have been consulted and are in agreement with the contents of this report.

11 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 11.1 Six monthly Performance Indicator Returns to Scottish Executive 2003/2004 - 2006/2007.
- 11.2 Planning & Transportation Department Service Plan 2004-2007.
- 11.3 SPPI The Planning System Scottish Executive Development Department 2002.

- 11.4 Report of the Targets Working Group. Scottish Executive Development Department October 1999.
- 11.5 Resources for Planning - Ove Arup & Partners 2005 (Para 7.29).
- 11.6 The Planning Etc (Scotland) Act 2006.

Mike Galloway
Director of Planning & Transportation

Ian Mudie
Head of Planning

IGSM/IAR/DDB

4 April 2007

Dundee City Council
Tayside House
Dundee

ANNEX 1

Performance Indicator	2003/2004	2004/2005	2005/2006	2006/2007
% Householder applications determined <2 months SE Target: 90% Service Plan Target: 85%	79% (81%)	77% (79.8%)	85.75%	80%
% all applications determined <2 months SE Target: 80% Service Plan Target: 60%	61% (64%)	62.5% (62.9%)	62%	59%
% Householder applications determined <3 months SE Target: 95% Service Plan Target: 95%	95% (93%)	90.9% (91.5%)	95.8%	93.7%
% All applications determined <3 months SE Target: 85% Service Plan Target: 85%	82% (81%)	82.2% (79.1%)	79.4%	79.2%
% Major applications determined <4 months SE Target: 80% Service Plan Target: N/A	81% (49%)	74% (51.8%)	66%	71%
Applications received	942 (+ 13%)	969(+2.8%)	975 (30.6%)	1,108 (+ 13.6%)
Applications Determined	857 (+18%)	919(+7.2%)	902 (-1.8%)	948 (+5%)
Applications Received per Case Officer per annum (6 case officers)* National Average: 143	157	161	163	184 (+12.9%)
Service Plan Performance Measure % of road construction consent applications determined in 12 weeks Target: 90%	77.3%	78.9%	93%	92.5%

Source: Scottish Executive 6 Monthly Statistical Returns 2002/2003-2005/2006

Note: () = Scottish Average

*A recent report by Ove Arup & Partners for the Scottish Executive indicated that the estimated Scottish average of 143 applications received per case officer.

ANNEX 2

Road Construction Consent Performance Indicators

Year	Total No of RCC Applications	Average Processing Time (weeks)	% of applications processed in 8 weeks	% of applications processed in 12 weeks
2001-2002	21	6	80.9%	100%
2002-2003	20	10	45%	80.0%
2003-2004	22	9	59.1%	77.3%
2004-2005	19	10	38.8%	78.9%
2005-2006	13	7	76%	93%
2006-2007	27	7	66.7%	92.5%

The Service Plan Performance target for the processing of Road Construction Consent (RCC) applications is to have 90% processed within 12 weeks.

The above figures indicate that this year's target has been reached. This is mainly due to a streamlining of the procedure for registering applications by trying to ensure that the appropriate number of drawings and the correct forms are signed at the time the submission thereby reducing delays in the RCC process.

It should be noted, however, that there are overriding factors which contribute to this pattern. The applications that took an unusually long time to process were held up due to matters outwith the RCC process. For example, it should also be noted that with such a low number of applications, statistically if one or two applications are delayed, this can have a disproportionately adverse effect on the figures.

Another influencing factor in all years is the need for some applications at a completed stage to await Committee approval.

Most Local Authorities in Scotland work to a 12 week cycle for processing RCC applications and do not submit the RCCs to Committee for approval.