

Report of Chief Planning Officer

Report to Joint Plans Panel

Date: 11 September 2014

Subject: Planning service review

Are specific electoral Wards affected? If relevant, name(s) of Ward(s):	☐ Yes	☒ No
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	☐ Yes	☒ No
Is the decision eligible for Call-In?	☐ Yes	☒ No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? If relevant, Access to Information Procedure Rule number: Appendix number:	☐ Yes	☒ No

Summary of main issues

1. Planning services commissioned a review of the service by Ove Arup and Partners Limited (Arup) and Lynda Addison Consulting in early 2014. The review took approximately four months to complete and the service is now in possession of their final report and suggested action plan.
2. The review heavily involved staff from planning and sustainable development, elected members and senior council officers. Representatives from the development industry and community organisations were also involved.
3. The main aim of the review was to assess the adequacy of the council's development management function and whether it was efficiently using resources to achieve an effective, high quality service, capable of delivering the growth agenda in Leeds.
4. A number of significant themes came through the review process- resourcing the service and building capacity, value for money, ICT and the need to take a multi-disciplinary approach on the largest and most significant applications, particularly residential sites, in order to meet corporate ambitions.
5. The Arup action plan forms the basis of a planning services action plan which is currently being developed; a number of quick wins have been identified and will start to be implemented in early autumn 2014.

Recommendations

6. Members are recommended to note the report and comment as they see appropriate.

1 Purpose of this report

- 1.1 This report describes the review recently undertaken by Ove Arup and Partners Limited (Arup) and Lynda Addison Consulting on planning services. The review has been completed and the service is now about to embark on the implementation stage. This report describes the next steps, reporting and governance arrangements in this implementation stage.

2 Background information

- 2.1 A review was commissioned by Planning Services and carried out by Arup and Lynda Addison Consulting in early 2014, concluding in July 2014. The overall aim of the review was to consider whether the council's development management function is efficiently using resources to achieve an effective, high quality service which is capable of delivering the growth agenda in Leeds.
- 2.2 The main areas of focus were:
- appropriateness of resources – the structure, scale and mix of the service;
 - workload volume and level of support – efficiency and (process) effectiveness;
 - culture change – embedding the development management approach and striving for high performance;
 - consider the current service income and identify any further opportunities for further monetising the service;
 - broadly considering the overall determination process, focusing in on sub-elements of the process if/where improvements or cost-savings can be identified and whether modified processes are more appropriate.
- 2.3 The review followed a methodology of internal and external stakeholder interviews, data analysis, and workshops to form a number of emerging conclusions and recommendations. A final report was produced by Arup along with a suggested high level action plan. The action plan is attached as appendix 1.
- 2.4 The final report evaluates the current function of planning services, considers the service's capacity to deliver now and in the future, makes a number of recommendations on efficiencies, income generation, savings and staffing levels.
- 2.5 Throughout the review staff from planning services, planning policy, SDU, Highways, Legal services, Director of City Development, the Chief Executive, Chief Economic Development Officer, Plans Panel Chairs, the small working group and the Executive Board Member for Neighbourhoods, Planning and Personnel have been engaged. In addition, external stakeholders including volume house builders and other representatives from the development industry and community representatives have also been engaged. Regular communications and updates have been provided to staff, City Development Management Team and senior elected members on the progress of the review as well as circulation of relevant documents to facilitate buy-in and ongoing positive involvement. Comments received throughout the review have been fed back into the process, as appropriate.

3 Main issues

3.1 The review provided a fundamental analysis of how the service currently operates, considered the decision making process to see if it provided value for money, with high quality outcomes and identified opportunities for service improvement and efficiencies. With such a wide ranging brief, the review has “scratched the surface” of many issues which will be investigated in detail, going forward. However, several areas came out clearly in the report, which are described below.

3.2 Resourcing the service

3.2.1 An aim of the review was to ascertain if the service is appropriately resourced to respond to current and future service demand. Of the Core Cities, Leeds has the second highest number of major applications, which includes a number of large scale residential and other significant schemes. The national average of major applications received by a local planning authority is 3%; Leeds has around 4%, some of which are large, complex, sensitive and of strategic importance. This means for individual officers there is often a disproportionately complex caseload profile and a numerical count of cases alone does not provide the whole picture.

3.2.2 However, Arup undertook a resourcing exercise to look at the current staffing level, assessing its adequacy in the context of current and future workloads. They concluded that the current level of FTE was broadly right for the current volume of workload, provided the recommended efficiencies in the report and change management process were embarked on.

3.2.3 Additionally, an assessment of application trends over the last three years was undertaken. Based on this data the consultants forecast that by 2019 application numbers are likely to increase by approximately 4,000, to a total of c9,600 applications. An analysis of historical patterns of residential applications shows that the delivery of 70,000 homes is likely to lead to over 2,400 additional residential applications across the plan period. Therefore they conclude that in meeting the growth aspirations of the City, coupled with an improvement in the economy even if their recommendations were fully implemented, additional staff *would be* required to meet future ambitions.

3.3 Value for money and fit for purpose

3.3.1 The consultants recognised Leeds workload is unlike most other authorities given the volume of applications, profile of applications, urban nature of much of the authority but also large rural areas, as well as the scale of the planned growth for both housing and employment. The consultants also recognised that the current Leeds model for development management is inherently “more expensive” than in other authorities where there are fewer panels, lower lever of engagement and requirements around servicing elected members and the local community.

3.3.2 The consultants suggested that as the service is resourced for the current workload with little contingency for absences or increases in workload, the service needs to choose where its resources are deployed, as it cannot continue do everything at the current level. The report recommends the service takes a more

proportionate approach to the determination of applications. This will involve officers taking a more “business like” approach to deployment of time and resources including use of consultees.

3.3.3 Another aim of the review was to ensure the service represented value for money and is efficient in its operation. Given that the consultants considered the current staff resource is adequate for the current volume of work, it is recommended that the service needs to create capacity now to facilitate better working, to speed up the process and deliver high quality schemes, but that our internal processes, internal relationships, ICT, structure and lack of a pro-active culture are to greater or lesser degrees hindering this. By implementing the suggested changes the whole process would be more efficient and focussed and provide that additional capacity thus enabling the service to respond better to current and future service demands.

3.3.4 The service needs to build capacity in the first instance to create the time and space to make the changes that are required and the report highlights a number of ways this could be achieved:

- A “can do” approach to growth, but not at any price, with officer buy in and management reinforcement
- Managers making the time to manage- this will ensure there is better case management, workload management and support in decisive decision making
- Balancing caseloads and experience levels across the area planning teams
- Consultation, focussing on schemes where it adds most value and empowering officers to use greater judgement on other applications
- Reengineered processes including validation and registration, site notices
- Reviewing the level and scope of pre-application advice, taking a cost sensitive approach
- Taking a more proportionate approach to determination of applications, particularly on non-contentious applications

3.4 ICT

3.4.1 A key theme of the review was the use of ICT to deliver a speedy and efficient service, which supports business needs.

3.4.2 The review concluded that the service is not maximising the benefits of the current system and suggests an independent CAPS/ Enterprise staff user group is established to take forward the development of the system. This would allow staff feedback on the current system and for system users to help devise solutions to any issues. The consultants also suggest engaging with other advanced users of the same system to explore best practice through site visits.

3.4.3 The service is currently operating a dual paper based and electronic system, creating, at times, duplication and delays in the process. The recommendation is that the service moves increasingly to electronic working in order to realise further operating efficiencies. It is also likely that savings would be generated from the

reduction in printing, creation of hard copy files etc. However, this also requires a significant cultural shift with all stakeholders, not only planning officers.

- 3.4.4 There will need to be more emphasis and promotion of the Planning Portal as a way of submitting applications and development of the LCC website to encourage self-service; these will also generate operating efficiencies.

3.5 **Multi-disciplinary approach**

- 3.5.1 The report highlights that there are particular issues in terms of the time to determine applications on schemes for major dwellings and on major manufacturing applications and suggests the need for a stronger multi-disciplinary approach on the largest schemes. This may be particularly appropriate for major residential schemes, especially with a number of large housing schemes coming forward, where such a multi-disciplinary team would be able to deliver housing expeditiously, helping to achieve corporate ambitions, achieve housing targets and deliver the New Homes Bonus. Time expended early saves time and effort further into the process as well as helping to deliver higher quality schemes. It would also provide additional opportunities for fee earning activity in terms of pre-application services or Planning Performance Agreements. However the service also needs to ensure these services are fit for purpose and needs to review the core offering and charging structure.

3.6 **Next steps**

- 3.6.1 The Arup action plan will form the basis of the planning service action plan which will be worked up to identify priorities, timescales and deliverables. A number of “quick wins” have been identified to release the necessary capacity in order to move the other actions forward. However, the service is taking a measured approach as it wishes to involve staff in working groups to develop potential solutions and this has resource implications. Therefore the service will initially focus on a small number of initial actions with other actions timetabled in the long, medium and short term. Immediate actions include:

- reviewing the validation and registration process- getting valid applications to planning officers more quickly
- Establishment of an ICT systems group
- Area planning team composition and workload
- Pre-application service
- More proportionate approach for delegated reports

- 3.6.2 In terms of governance, the Planning Services Leadership Team (PSLT) will take a role in maintaining the overview of the project, with the development project manager reporting to PSLT on progress on a monthly basis.

- 3.6.3 Monthly planning updates involving the Chief Planning Officer will take place as well as quarterly updates to City Development Directorate meetings and to the Executive Board Member for Neighbourhoods, Planning and Personnel.

4 Corporate Considerations

4.1 Consultation and Engagement

- 4.1.1 The planning review has undergone extensive consultation with staff, the Trade Unions, Plans Panel Chairs, small working group, Executive Board Member and representatives from the development industry and local community groups.

4.2 Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration

- 4.2.1 There are no specific equality and diversity or cohesion and integration issues arising from this report.

4.3 Council policies and City Priorities

- 4.3.1 The effective and expeditious determination of planning applications contributes to the overall prosperity of the city and plays a key part in the regeneration and growth agenda. Development management has an integral role in promoting sustainable and inclusive economic growth, a Best Council Plan priority.

4.4 Resources and value for money

- 4.4.1 A fundamental aim of the review was to assess if the service was providing value for money and value in judgement. The review concluded that with current workloads, broadly, there is the correct number of staff for the workload, provided the efficiency measures outlined in the action plan are implemented. However, in meeting the Council's ambitious growth agenda of delivering 70,000 new homes coupled with the improvement in the economy it is likely that application numbers will rise. This is likely to have resource implications on the service which will need to be addressed. There may also be scope for additional revenue streams or charging for particular services, including the pre-application service for other types of applications.

4.5 Legal Implications, Access to Information and Call In

- 4.5.1 There are no specific legal implications and this report does not relate to any key or major decisions.

4.6 Risk Management

- 4.6.1 Local Planning Authorities are at risk of being placed in special measures if they fail to determine 40% of major applications in time and lose more than 20% of major planning appeals, additionally the planning guarantee is now in place which means that any application not determined within 26 weeks is liable for the fee to be returned. This means there are a number of risks associated with the decision making process which are both financial and reputational.

5 Conclusions

- 5.1 The review, by the nature of its wide remit has scratched the surface of many of the issues facing the service, but it has highlighted a number of areas where the service can improve its efficiency through the implementation of new process and use of ICT, working smarter in a multi-disciplinary way, taking a more proportionate business-like approach to resource inputs, finding ways to increase capacity to allow managers to manage and support case officers and adopting a “Leeds way” of doing things.
- 5.2 It’s important that the service “gets its house in order” now, whilst workloads remain relatively steady, but this is only part of the solution should workloads rise as the consultants predict. If the council is to deliver its growth agenda it is likely additional resources will be needed in the future.
- 5.3 The review highlighted that there are particular issues in delivering large scale residential schemes and employment schemes and a more innovative multi-disciplinary development team approach may be required. This potentially has resource implications. Essentially, if the city is to grow so will the resource needs of the service to facilitate that growth.
- 5.4 The Arup action plan will form the basis of a planning services action plan and this currently being developed. Staff buy-in to this change management process is essential; some of the changes will be process based or procedural, others are cultural which may take longer to embed. The staff working groups will help to deliver particular solutions and frequent communications will be provided to staff to ensure that there is momentum and continued buy-in to the change management programme. Similarly, CDD and elected members will also receive regular updates as the plan is implemented.

6 Recommendations

- 6.1 Members are recommended to note the report and comment as they see appropriate.

7 Background documents

Appendix 1

No.	Action / Area	Priority	Timescale	Review Theme					
				Culture	Structure & Management	Process & IT	Decision making	Performance management	Efficiency & VfM
1	Publish review report and disseminate findings to staff as part of a discussion exercise to encourage buy-in to the process and actions. This should be part of an ongoing consultative and informative staff-wide communications process.	High	Short-term						
2	Develop action list into improvement plan, adding in owners, leads, timescales and risk / mitigation strategies. The existing management group should review this on an ongoing basis as part of the regular meeting agendas. It is vital that progress is driven, supported and reinforced.	High	Short-term						
3	Senior managers should carry little to no caseload. Time focus should be on managing cases through staff. Effort needs to be made in the first instance to 'making time to improve' and freeing up time for area managers to buy capacity. This will also be achieved through other efficiency efforts.	High	Short-term						
4	Ensure comprehensive use of new internal consultee function on Enterprise, and production of standard responses for more straightforward consultation requests.	High	Short-term						
5	Diarise and ensure case reviews take place (as a minimum) at the 'start' and 'prior to officer report writing' points of the decision-making process. These meetings are to ensure managers can guide, instruct, support and empower case officers to determine cases and develop their own abilities. Senior case officers should be encouraged and supported to devolve some tasks to more junior members of staff. Applications are projects and are determined by the project team.	High	Short-term						
6	Drive an attitude of consistency – there should be 'one way of doing it' at both a team and individual level.	High	Short-term						

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				Culture	Structure & Management	Process & IT	Decision making	Performance management	Efficiency & VfM
7	Consider the service structure in the light of review findings re: management, caseload, seniority, experience and process. This need not involve a restructure, but rather a definition of roles and responsibilities at each 'level' of the organogram (note: as distinct from staff career grades) in terms of staff / line management, caseload management, caseload (level and type of applications typically tasked with), report review and sign-off and delegated decision sign-off. This is not about defining 'job descriptions' (and the associated culture) by roles within the development management process. To also define (or clarify, or remove) responsibilities of 'Technical' and 'Managerial' roles and circulate to Principal Planners.	High	Short-term						
8	Drop creation and use of paper files as standard. Requirement for paperless working, accepting that for some (defined) applications, plans and complex reports or similar items may be required in hard copy. Registration and validation should be electronic, and printing plans or other documents should be by exception.	High	Short-term						
9	Ensure ownership of the registration and validation process by technical staff, by reviewing and agreeing the Local Validation List and distinguishing between 'legally valid' and 'nice-to-have' documents.	High	Short-term						
10	Set up an IT / Systems Work Group, to receive, log and co-ordinate systems improvements. To be independently chaired by someone with relevant expertise, and to draw upon technical expertise of e-planning, and practical day-to-day experience of middle manager case officers and registration / validation team.	High	Short-term						
11	IT / Systems Work Group to produce on-going electronic systems 'Request and Action List'	High	Short-term						
12	Further develop streamlined 'handle once' registration and validation process	High	Short-term						

No.	Action / Area	Priority	Timescale	Review Theme					
				Culture	Structure & Management	Process & IT	Decision making	Performance management	Efficiency & VfM
13	Embed joined-up, collaborative and multidisciplinary working in a proportionate way. This should run across the process (pre-application advice, PPAs, validation, determination, S106 and monitoring/conditions). To include a large-scale majors multi-disciplinary team approach, and IT sharing/access of pre-application advice between disciplines. Encourage and support creative approaches to internal consultation, subject to robust and fair means of recording these electronically.	High	Medium-term						
14	Hold quarterly developer forum meetings with officers to build relationship between development industry and Leeds City Council. Focus on establishing the LCC quality standard and instilling submissions that meet it – explained in terms of applicant benefits around consistency and timeliness.	High	Medium-term						
15	Review the initial data from the time-charge system and calculate the absolute cost of delivering pre-application meetings.	High	Medium-term						
16	Encourage more effective uptake of PPAs through: reviewing the style and structure, greater training to officers of ‘good practice’ examples, process for better engagement of internal stakeholders, and guidance for developers to highlight benefits of entering one and the corresponding service offer. PPAs should be a project plan used to drive the project. Review charges based on timesheet information.	High	Medium-term						
17	Introduce time recording for all Planning Services staff, highlighting the need to be able to understand the relative cost of the component work areas. Design charging codes (e.g. administrative tasks, applications, pre-applications, member briefing) for the system and ensure all staff complete a weekly timesheet on a daily basis.	Medium-High	Short-term						
18	Validation and Registration Officers to work out number of Adobe Standard Licenses required to limit ‘printing to scan’ (equivalent of 2.5 FTE)	Medium	Short-term						
19	Review content of the Leeds Planning Webpage and improve awareness of the planning portal, by directing email and phone call enquiries to the website. To explore ways of driving use of the planning portal by applicants and web by consultees and applicants.	Medium	Short-term						

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				Culture	Structure & Management	Process & IT	Decision making	Performance management	Efficiency & VfM
20	Review process of uploading revised plans and copying conditions.	Medium	Short-term						
21	Arrange bi-monthly Manager Team Meetings to ensure consistency in decision-making, to discuss resources and allow for efficient delegation of work horizontally across officers of equal experience. Meeting agendas should include updates on improvement, changes to process and updates on the overall corporate objectives.	Medium	Short-term						
22	Case officers to display Site Notices as part of early site visits.	Medium	Short-term						
23	Review access rights and format of performance reports – all officers should be able to access relevant performance reporting. This applies to senior management (strategic overview and dashboard), team managers (workloads and performance for teams and individuals) and individual officers (own performance against averages and targets).	Medium	Short-term						
24	Produce a training strategy / materials to cover the items within the improvement plan.	Medium	Short-term						
25	Evolving the ‘open for business – but not at any cost’ ethos into something more customer-facing. The ‘not at any cost’ is implicit in the Leeds ‘single way’ of doing things. Including this element within the overall ethos arguably undoes the value of the entire statement.	Medium	Medium-term						
26	Limit the ‘anytime’ nature of the ‘Duty Planner’ pre-application service to scheduled afternoon sessions.	Medium	Medium-term						
27	Create an updated pro forma of required information for pre-application advice, make it available on the web-site and an integral part of the outputs from pre-application advice meetings.	Medium	Medium-term						
28	Assess requirements resource for increasing home / mobile working. Includes specification with New Ways of Working and additional laptops and / or wireless network coverage associated with creative approaches to internal consultation.	Medium	Medium-term						
29	Case officers to chair interdisciplinary ‘surgery session’ style pre-meetings for pre-application discussions to ensure that there is a single view on applications and discussions.	Medium	Medium-term						

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30	All consultation responses should be visible on public access.	Medium	Medium-term						
31	Following time-recording, review of meeting / corporate / member responsibilities – review with a aim of reducing, delegating or rationalising.	Medium	Medium-term						
32	Roll out ongoing training for all new processes (and monitoring of who is / is not doing both the training and the correct process working).	Medium	Medium-term						
33	Scope, devise and implement an escalation process. It should be formal in designation but informal in operation.	Medium	Medium-term						
34	Review the overall approach, emphasis and resource-base for householder applications. Will need to draw in findings from time-recording about the current inputs. To also consider the approach to pre-application advice (distinguishing agent-led application or enquiries from others).	Medium	Medium-term						
35	Craft a business case for additional resources following successful implementation of more efficient working if necessary.	Medium	Long-term						
36	Introduce logging of all site-specific pre-application discussions on to the IT system (including a geographic reference).	Medium	Long-term						
37	Encourage greater liaison between Legal Services and officers around S106 agreements, at a stage when components (topics) of the S106 have been agreed. To include a review of the Section 106 instruction process.	Low	Short-term						
38	Produce ‘electronic shortcuts’ bulletin of less familiar quick solutions to using electronic systems.	Low	Short-term						
39	IT / Systems work group to visit other LPAs.	Low	Medium-term						
40	IT / Systems work group to consider external specialist support for in-depth review	Low	Medium-term						

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				Culture	Structure & Management	Process & IT	Decision making	Performance management	Efficiency & VfM
41	Prepare and circulate a case worker bulletin, to cover the content of PSLT and SMT discussions, detail particularly contentious cases, provide updates on the Core Strategy and provide updates on emerging planning guidance or legislation.	Low	Medium-term						
42	Display public notices in only the Yorkshire Evening Post.	Low	Medium-term						
43	Periodic management review of appeals. To understand the appeal trends, including reasons for appeal, 'source' of appeal reason within the service, and where and why costs are being awarded.	Low	Medium-term						
44	Set up a process of 'case officer rotation' between planning teams or 'work-shadowing' to encourage more efficient cascade of work. Include a review of career progression from technical officer to planning officer.	Low	Long-term						
45	Periodic management review of caseload allocation to ensure consistency and fairness.	Low	Long-term						