

Report of Chief Planning Officer

Report to Joint Plans Panel

Date: 6 July 2016

Subject: End of year performance report for 2015-16

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. In the reporting period April 2015 to March 2016, application numbers submitted overall were up slightly from those submitted in 2014-15. Over 4,300 decisions were made on applications over the year.
2. Performances on the statutory timescale for determining applications has continued to improve this year. The performance on determination of major applications is particularly noteworthy, with almost 97% of major applications being determined in the agreed timescale.
3. Service improvements continue to be made: the implementation of the actions identified through the Arup review, a workshop with the top submitting householder agents to improve the quality of submissions and service delivery, the retention of the Customer Services Excellence award and electronic working with Parish and Town Councils.
4. It has nevertheless been a challenging year, balancing workloads and the available resources within a changing planning environment, brought about by the Governments planning reform agenda and pick up in the economy.

Recommendation

5. Members are asked to note the report, comment as they feel appropriate and to receive a further performance report in six months time.

1 Purpose of this report

- 1.1 At the last Joint Plans Panel meeting on 28 January 2016, members received and noted a performance report for planning services for quarters 1 to 3, covering the period April to December 2015. It was resolved that the Joint Plans Panel would receive a year end performance report for 2015-16 at its next meeting.
- 1.2 This report is presented for information and comment.

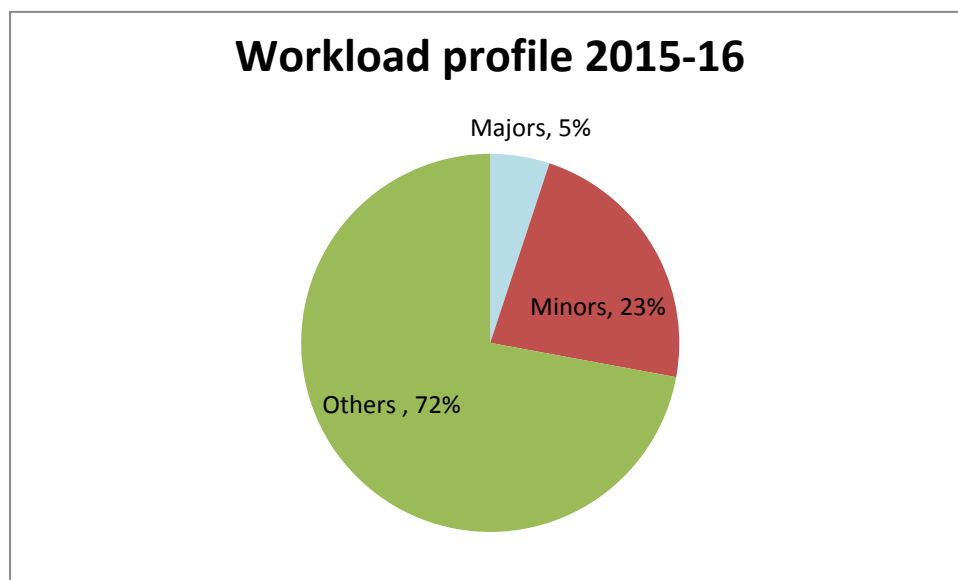
2 Background information

- 2.1 In the reporting period, application numbers submitted overall were up slightly from 4,511 in 2014-15 to 4,692 in 2015-16 a 4% increase, with 4,384 decisions being made in 2015-16.
- 2.2 In 2015-16 the service continued to deal with a significant workload, whilst progressing with a number of large and strategically important planning applications. There has been significant activity with major projects being progressed across the city in the past year. The last year has been marked by sites being brought forward for development on both brownfield and greenfield sites.
- 2.3 The number of planning applications received in 2015-16 increased in comparison with those received in 2014-15 and performance against government time targets for determining applications has improved significantly across all categories in comparison with the previous year. It is particularly important to hit time targets with the government's planning guarantee whereby out of time majors over 26 weeks old are liable for their fee to be returned if there is not an agreement in place to continue the period of time before a decision is made.
- 2.4 The service uses several measures to assess the quality of decision making: lost appeals, number of complaints and upheld complaints. Performance in these areas compares well with last year and there were two local settlements on Ombudsman complaints. There are also fewer appealed decisions in 2015-16 compared with 2014-15 and there are more appeals being dismissed by the Planning Inspectorate in 15-16, compared with 14-15.
- 2.5 The service has an ongoing commitment to service improvement and a number of activities have taken place throughout the year to ensure the decision making process is robust and accountable and customer service is integral to the organisation.

3 Main issues

3.1 Planning performance and workload

- 3.1.1 In 2015-16, April 2015 to March 2016, there were 4,692 applications received by the local planning authority (LPA) a 4% increase from the previous year. This is the fourth successive year to see a gradual increase in the numbers of applications submitted.
- 3.1.2 The number of major applications received increased slightly this year to 238 compared with 232 in 2014-15. Major applications represent around 5% of the total current workload of the service. Nationally, local planning authority's workloads comprise around 3% of majors, so Leeds receives a greater number of larger applications than the national average. The workload profile in 2015-16 is demonstrated in the pie chart below:



- 3.1.3 There were 4,384 decisions made between April 2015 to March 2016, this is an increase of 6% from the previous year where 4,119 decisions were made. Most decisions are made by officers under the delegation scheme and in 2015-16, 97.8% of all decisions on applications were made by officers, this compares with 96% delegation in 2014-15.
- 3.1.4 The government sets national performance targets for decision making on planning applications as follows:
- 60% of major applications determined within 13 weeks
 - 65% of minor applications determined within 8 weeks
 - 80% of other applications determined within 8 weeks
- 3.1.5 The method of calculating the number of applications deemed to be in time changed under the provisions of The Growth and Infrastructure Act. Applications are counted as being in time if they meet the statutory

determination timescales for different categories of applications or where an extension of time agreement is in place. An extension of time agreement needs to be agreed by both the applicant and local planning authority and can be a useful tool for project managing larger and more complex applications, in order to ensure greater certainty of timescales. Extensions of time agreements were brought in in 2014-15 and the table below shows performance over the last few years, including the financial year 2015-16.

	% Majors in time	% Minors in time	% Other in time
2015-16	96.6%	90.6%	93.5%
2014-15	88.7	85.1	91.8
2013-14	73.3	70.3	83.3
2012-13	61.3	77.4	88.9

- 3.1.6 Clearly, there has been a significant improvement in performance of applications determined in time across all categories of applications. Overall 93% of the total application workload is determined within agreed timescales. The latest national figures covering the period January to March 2016¹ showed that LPAs had decided 82% of major applications in 13 weeks or the agreed time. Therefore not only is Leeds performance continuing to improve, it is also significantly above the national average determination rate.
- 3.1.7 The planning guarantee was brought in through The Town and Country Planning (Fees for Applications, Deemed Applications, Requests and Site Visits) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2013 and is now operational and means that any application over six months old after 1 April 2013, where there is no extension of time agreement, can have the planning fee refunded. Since 1st October 2013 when fee returns became liable, a total of £14,399 has been refunded, £8,280 of this was refunded between April 2015 and March 2016 and relates to four schemes. Whilst this is a relatively small amount, officers have been instructed to try to negotiate extension of time agreements for those applications reaching six months old, wherever possible, to mitigate the risk of returning the fees.
- 3.1.8 Planning fees in the year totalled £3,402,670, a reduction of £52K compared with the previous year and £44,700 below the set budget. The review of the pre-application service in February 2015 resulted in the removal of the free services previously provided and in 2015-16 £181K income was generated, compared with around £74K in 2014-15. A Highways recharge for their input into the pre-application work amounted to £35K.

¹ Department of Communities and Local Government, Planning applications January to March 2016 Statistical Release, 16 June 2016

3.2 Comparison with Core Cities

3.2.1 The table below shows the performance of the Core Cities for 2015-16.

	% Applications Determined in time		
	Major	Minor	Other
Birmingham	90%	81%	92%
Bristol	87%	83%	88%
Cardiff	27%	73%	66%
Leeds	96%	91%	94%
Liverpool	66%	56%	61%
Manchester	82%	80%	84%
Newcastle	88%	74%	81%
Nottingham	92%	88%	87%
Sheffield	90%	80%	88%

3.2.2 From the table it can be seen that Leeds is performing very well, with the highest performance across all categories of applications in comparison with the Core Cities.

3.2.3 The table below shows the level of pre-application activity in the Core Cities and the amount of income generated. These discretionary fees are becoming an increasingly important part of the overall planning fee income, however LPAs are only allowed to cover costs, not make any profit from the service.

	Numbers received	Income
Birmingham	1424 (702 paid for)	£79,712
Bristol	414	£118,768
Cardiff	183	£108,130
Leeds	803	£194,610 (gross)
Liverpool	233	£117,660
Manchester	Do not record	No Charge
Newcastle	363	£102,175
Nottingham	391	£47,892
Sheffield	601	£219,462

3.3 Permitted development

3.3.1 Following the publication of the Development Management Procedure Order and GPDO in April 2015 further changes to permitted development rights came into force on 6th April 2016 making office to residential a permanent right and allowing laundrettes and light industrial to be converted to residential with a prior approval process.

3.3.2 During 2015-16, 226 decisions were made on larger single storey rear extensions of which 202 were PD (no objections from neighbours), eight were approved and 16 refused. Only one of the refusals resulted in an

appeal which was allowed. In terms of office to residential conversions, 31 decisions were made on 31 prior approvals in the year of which 28 were approved and three refused. The biggest schemes approved included 127 flats at Headingley Office Park (three blocks), 65 flats at Zicon House, Wade Lane, 60 flats at 5-7 New York Road and 36 flats at Bramley Shopping Centre.

- 3.3.3 Fourteen decisions on change of use from agricultural to dwellings under the PD rules were made – three required a planning application, four were approved and seven refused

3.4 **Panel decision making and decisions not in accordance with the officer recommendation**

- 3.4.1 In 2015- 16, the three Plans Panels considered 197 items at 37 meetings and decided 127 applications. Four decisions were contrary to officer recommendation, two at North and East Panel and two at South and West Panel; this is the lowest level it has been in recent years. Of those decisions two have led to appeals-one where the decision is not yet known and one where the appeal was allowed. The public inquiry White Bear at Tingley was dismissed.

- 3.4.2 The reduction in the number of decisions contrary to officer recommendation in 2015-16 is an improvement from the position last year where 14 decisions were contrary to officer recommendation. The table below shows progress over a number of years:

Year	Decisions	Overturns (% overturns)	Appeals Against Refusal	Dismissed	Allowed	Costs awarded
2015-16	127	4 (3%)	2	0	1	0
2014-15	191	14 (7%)	9	4	5	0
2013-14	136	7 (5%)	0	0	0	0
2012-13	127	8 (6%)	3	0	3	2
2011-12	171	11 (6%)	5	1	4	0

3.5 **Appeals**

- 3.5.1 The table below shows that performance on the number of appeals dismissed has improved in the period April 2015 to March 2016 compared with the previous year. A continuous review of appeal decisions takes place

to ensure that any common themes are highlighted and measures put in place to mitigate the risk of appeals occurring on similar grounds. However, there is a careful balance to be made between refusing an application with the risk of a subsequent appeal and maintaining design quality, without being unreasonable.

Year	Appealed Decisions	Dismissed	Costs awarded against Council	Costs awarded to Council
2015-16	231	74.1%	3 partial, 1 full	1 partial, 1 full
2014-15	237	66%	5	0
2013-14	251	71%	4	0
2012-13	187	67%	3	0
2011-12	254	69%	7	2

- 3.5.2 In 2014-15 the main area of concern was householder appeals where out of 110 appeal decisions, 40% were allowed; performance in this area in 15-16 has considerably improved where out of 104 householder appeal decisions 24.5% were allowed; 71 were dismissed and ten split decisions.
- 3.5.3 In financial year 2015-16 appeal costs of just over £12,500 have been paid. The Council has gained two cost awards; one settled at £385, the other following the withdrawal from a public inquiry is still under negotiation, but the latest offer from the appellant to settle is £37,500.
- 3.5.4 There have just been two Public Inquiries during 2015-16 – the PAS Housing appeal at Bradford Road, East Ardsley where the result is awaited and the MacDonalds appeal at the White Bear, Tingley where the appeal was dismissed. 2016-17 promises to be much busier as the PAS housing appeals at Bramhope and Collingham have taken place in April, there is a further PAS housing appeal for Kippax in July and Kirklees Knoll will reopen again (third inquiry) later in the year. Major Inquiries for a student scheme at Victoria Road, Headingley and a locally contentious community facility at the Ice Pak site in Beeston are also in the pipeline. The decision for the PAS housing application at Grove Road, Boston Spa is currently with Ministers.

3.6 Major projects

- 3.6.1 The significant building activity on major projects has continued in the past year. Substantial numbers of both brownfield and greenfield sites are under construction now resulting in increased housing delivery and activity in many other sectors.
- 3.6.2 Phase 1 of the Victoria Gate development to bring a landmark John Lewis store to the city is progressing well on site and will open later in 2016. Construction has started on an extension to the White Rose Centre to include the extension of two existing stores and a multiplex cinema including an Imax screen. The new retail units in Kirkstall centre on the former BHS/ Alders site opened in the past year as did the new rail station at Apperley Bridge. The new rail station at Kirkstall Forge is due to open shortly with construction under way on the first phase on the site for commercial offices.

- 3.6.3 The City Council has invested in the refurbishment and redevelopment of Little London, Beeston Hill / Holbeck estates and that work is now well advanced and nearing completion. Council housing has also been delivered in the year and a number of schemes are in the pipeline for delivery at various stages including a scheme for the elderly in Yeadon. Private sector sites at Otley Hospital, Daisy Hill, Morley and Otter Island are close to completion. Private sector housing is also under construction on brownfield and greenfield sites including some PAS sites that were brought forward to assist housing delivery eg Cookridge Hospital; High Royds; Optare site in Crossgates; Clariant / Riverside Mills at Horsforth / Rodley; Bodington, Adel; Royds Lane, Wortley; Asket Drive, Seacroft; Garnetts, Otley; Royds Lane, Rothwell; Fleet Lane, Oulton, and Owlars Farm, Morley. Within the City Centre the Dandara site in Holbeck for a large private rented apartment scheme has been given permission and is just getting under way with Low Fold on the East Bank expected to start this summer.
- 3.6.4 The second office building at Sovereign Street is under construction with the new public space. Further commercial developments at MEPC on Whitehall Road, Central Square (to include a winter garden) , Queen Street and Bond Court are at various stages of construction. The winter garden at Central square will be an added attraction and is at an advanced stage.
- 3.6.5 Within the main office core there has been significant construction to improve existing buildings to improve the quality of accommodation on offer, with new hotels under construction on Greek Street and Portland Place. Major office refurbishment schemes are on site at Merrion House and City House.
- 3.6.6 Downings are well advanced on a final phase of student accommodation close to the Civic Hall and a new student hall of residence is emerging at Trinity University in Horsforth. The new University Laidlaw Library is complete and is winning design awards. Work has started on the second former printing hall for the Leeds City College at Alf Cooke works and construction is well advanced for the Ruth Gorse Academy and the UTC as a growing education quarter emerges on the South Bank.
- 3.6.7 Outline planning approval has been granted in principle for the master planning at Quarry Hill and discussions are continuing on the second phase of Eastgate / Harewood, the refurbishment of the Yorkshire Playhouse and the relocation of Leeds City College to new build premises at Quarry Hill. – there are likely to be major schemes coming forward in detail in the coming year across the city. There are also significant proposals under discussion for Yorkshire Post site / City Reach in the West End of the City Centre and there are pre app proposals for significant tower blocks on several sites around the city centre.
- 3.6.8 Retail stores for Aldi and Lidl continue to be planned and built as they continue to expand – proposals for Garforth and Chapel Allerton are being progressed at present.

- 3.6.9 In the last year the Energy for Waste scheme at Cross Green and the five turbine wind farm at Micklefield commenced operation.

3.7 Compliance activity

- 3.7.1 The number of enforcement cases received 2015-16 has remained at the 2014-15 level. As such the workload through the service remains substantial with a significant number of complex cases being investigated. However, the number of cases on hand has been reduced overall to under 1000 which has been a long standing service objective. This is a key step in improving the overall handling of cases as it will ultimately assist in reducing officer caseloads as staffing issues are addressed.
- 3.7.2 The restructure of the compliance service has recently been completed and the final member of staff to be appointed started work in the spring. There are still some long standing staff absences to be addressed and it is hoped that further progress on service improvements, including the consultation and adoption of the local enforcement plan will move forward during the next reporting period.

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
No of cases received	320	334	293	307	1254
No of cases resolved	351	412	271	353	1387
Initial site visits					
Category 1: Site visit same day/within 1 day. Target 100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Category 2: Site visit within 2 working days. Target 95%	100%	93%	100%	100%	98.25%
Category 3: Site visit within 10 working days Target 90%	86% 95%*	87% 98%*	84% 96%*	84% 91%*	85.25% 90%*

* Figures for site visits undertaken within 20 working days in accordance with amended temporary target. See below.

3.7.3 Cases received and resolved and performance in undertaking initial site visits

- 3.7.4 Performance in undertaking initial site visits has been maintained with a revised target of 20 days for category 3 visits. This revised target has been in place throughout the reporting period due to the resource and staff absence experienced by the service.
- 3.7.5 In relation to the Category 1 and 2 cases the figures relate to a relatively small number of cases. For example there were 43 category 2 cases during

the reporting period and only 1 of those cases missed the 2 day target and this is reflected in the figures.

- 3.7.6 The overall number of open cases on hand has been reduced and currently stands at 953.

3.7.7 Outcomes of case resolved

- 3.7.8 The number of complaints investigated that that are found to either involve no breach of planning control or are minor infringements remains over the period at approximately 54%. This has gradually reduced from a figure of 60% in 2010/11. This can possibly be accounted for by the increased rigour in examining cases as they come into the service. Where there is clearly no breach of planning control, cases have not been opened and complainants advised that the matter will not be investigated and the reason why. The remaining 45% of cases which have been closed involve significant breaches which have been resolved to the satisfaction of the Council through negotiations, granting planning permission or formal enforcement action. Ward Member meetings have continued during the year. Invitations are sent out with the bi monthly key cases list which continues to be sent to both ward members and parish councils with updates on priority cases within each ward.

No Breach*	40%
Resolved by negotiation	28%
Breach but de minimis/ not expedient	14%
Planning permission/ CLU granted/ appeal allowed	13%
Enforcement/other Notices complied with/resolved by prosecution action	5%

*Includes matters that are "permitted development"; where no development or material change of use is involved; matters that were time exempt from enforcement action on investigation; or where approved plans and conditions have been found to have been complied with.

3.7.9 Enforcement and other Notices

- 3.7.10 A total of 88 enforcement and other notices have been served during the year. This is a continuation of activity levels of previous years. There have been three temporary stop notices served during the period in relation to both unauthorised building works that were continuing on site and not considered acceptable or likely to gain planning permission and development being undertaken that was potentially damaging to protected trees. We continue to take more formal action than all the other core cities by some distance reflecting the importance Members place in Leeds on the service.
- 3.7.11 In the period there have been 23 appeal decisions in relation to formal notices. Of these four (17.5%) have been allowed and eighteen (78.5%) have been dismissed and one (4%) has had a split decision. There has been one public inquiry in relation to land at Thorpe Lane for the change of use of agricultural land to JCB storage which was dismissed following the

inquiry and the enforcement notice to cease the use of the land is now in effect with a requirement to comply in the near future.

- 3.7.12 The compliance service continues to draft and issue its own notices with input from legal officers only on the more complex cases. This is continually monitored and whilst it does carry some risk, the resource savings in doing this are significant. It does however place increased pressure on case officers in progressing cases within the service and requires additional on-going training.

3.7.13 Prosecution Outcomes and outstanding cases

- 3.7.14 A small number of cases have been brought or are being brought before the courts for non-compliance with enforcement and other notices. These have been in relation to illegal tree works, car sales and non-compliance with enforcement notices for unauthorised building and fencing works. Two have resulted in successful prosecutions with modest fines and costs awarded. However, despite a successful prosecution in relation to one site the breach remains unresolved and a further prosecution or other court action needs to be considered. A number of cases have been sent letters before action and this threat of court action can be effective in securing compliance with notices and remedying the breach in advance of preparing formal papers for the courts.

3.7.15 Proactive Initiatives

3.7.16 City Centre long Stay Car Parks

- 3.7.17 Work continues to monitor and control unauthorised long stay car parks within the city centre although a review of the commuter car parking policy is now required following the granting of temporary permission for a number of car parks under the interim policy. Regular monitoring is undertaken of all car parks collaboratively with officers in parking services and action taken when required.

3.7.18 Headingley / Hyde Park To Let Boards

- 3.7.19 The Direction in relation to the Display of To Let Boards was finally reconfirmed in November 2015 and came into effect on the 1st December 2015 and runs until 1st December 2020. Proactive monitoring and enforcement of the Direction and the adopted code of practice to control the display of To Let Boards in parts of Headingley /Hyde Park is taking place to control the proliferation of display boards in identified problem areas. Areas that are not within the area but are reporting similar problems are being encouraged to adopt a voluntary code with landlords and letting agents to reduce the amount of display boards. Whilst the initiative in the code area is successful it is very resource hungry with regular surveys , particularly during the board free month. Follow up letters and actions are also very time consuming and need to be balanced against other work streams.

3.7.20 Derelict and Nuisance Sites

- 3.7.21 The compliance service continues to play a key role on the Derelict and Nuisance site initiative which is a cross department initiative to help secure improvements to sites in a poor state which have proved difficult to bring forward by one single action. A number of notices have been served together with actions from Building Control and other services. Improvements have been secured, in many cases without a large capital spend through coordinated action. A regular working group agrees actions and work continues with a rolling budget to secure improvements to the most problematic sites.

3.8 Staffing

- 3.8.1 During the year a total of five people have left from Planning Services; two from the Area Teams, two in Customer Services and one in Enforcement. Of the five, four left to go to alternative jobs and one retired. The enforcement restructure has been completed with an appointment made from Environmental Health. At the end of March the Minerals Team joined Planning Services from Sustainable Development Unit and in April 2016, the new Minerals team leader was appointed.
- 3.8.2 The service also has a new Head of Development Management, with a temporary, acting up appointment being made from May 2016 for six months.

3.9 Complaints

- 3.9.1 The service received 22 Ombudsman cases last year compared to 12 the previous year. Seventeen were received closed or, after preliminary investigation required no further action. Five cases required a written response from the service compared to three last year. One case was subsequently closed finding no maladministration. In four cases there was evidence of maladministration with two cases causing an injustice leading a financial settlement. The learning points from these cases have been cascaded to all Development Management planning officers and a change to the processing of applications has subsequently been made.
- 3.9.2 During the year, 125 complaints were dealt with, a similar level to 2014 -15. 14% of complaints were upheld, the same percentage as in 2014-15. Overall this represents good progress in a service where we are dealing with high volumes of applications and customers.
- 3.9.3 80 compliments were received in the year, significantly more than last year (31).

4 Service improvements

4.1 E-planning

- 4.1.1 Following the changes to the pre-application enquiry service there have been a number of enhancements to the back office system including

building in prompts for officers to ensure customers are contacted and receive a response within the published timescales.

- 4.1.2 There has been testing of the new Public Access system which offers better functionality, improved mapping and the ability to view larger documents and this is due to go live in June 2016

4.2 Household agents conference

- 4.2.1 As part of the proactive work with customers to improve the planning process in Leeds, a household agents' conference was held in October 2015. The top fifty agents (in terms of numbers submitted) were invited to the conference. Topics for discussion included reducing the number of invalid applications, use of the Planning Portal for more efficient submissions, permitted development changes and ensuring high quality design. Additionally there were round table discussions on what customers and the LPA can do to make the planning process more effective and deliver high quality outcomes.
- 4.2.2 The conference was well attended and feedback has been very positive. From the session an action plan is now being delivered to address the highlighted issues.
- 4.2.3 It is anticipated that this will become an annual event, providing ongoing dialogue with the agents who submit these types of applications.

4.3 Parish and Town Council electronic working

- 4.3.1 The local planning authority has a statutory requirement to notify Parish and Town Councils (PTC) of new applications in their area. In the past the service has gone beyond what is statutorily required by sending large format hard copy plans and application forms, by first class post to PTC. This has been provided at no charge to PTC, although the true cost in terms of staff time, printing and postage has been significant.
- 4.3.2 Following the annual review of the planning supplement to the Council's Charter in 2015, the service recommended to move to electronic working. This would mean that instead of the service sending hard copy plans and documents, PTC would receive an email notification of new applications, with a link to the application on Public Access. The move to electronic working has the benefit of speed, currency and ease of communicating about schemes; it also generates operational and financial efficiencies for the service.
- 4.3.3 Some concerns about this move were expressed by the PTC and therefore a working group with representatives from the PTC was established to work through the issues. The working group recommended a solution where small applications would be notified electronically, but plans and applications forms for major and minor applications would still be sent in hardcopy, but in a reduced format- A3 and A4. It was agreed to run this process as a pilot.

- 4.3.4 In January 2016, the pilot was reviewed and the PTC were consulted through an email survey. Many PTC indicated there were few problems, others indicated there were issues about printing their own large format plans. However, the review concluded that the service should move to full electronic working. The service hosted a conference with the PTC in early April 2016 and demonstrated Public Access and shared the rationale of the move to electronic working. The new notification process will commence in July 2016 and the service will monitor its implementation.

4.4 Pre-application review

- 4.4.1 Following the implementation of the new pre-application changes in February 2015, it was agreed that a review would be conducted after six months operation. This took place over the summer of 2015 and comprised analysis of the volumetric data and wide scale consultation with customers who had used the new service and with council officers and internal consultees.
- 4.4.2 The outcome of the review resulted in a number of changes making the pre-application process more efficient by providing greater clarity of the service and timescales and also the removal of the free services. Better communication and interaction with applicants was also required and a commitment to improve the content on the Council's website allowing customers to self-serve more easily by providing the relevant information for applicants, if they choose not to pay for a pre-application enquiry. These recommendations were agreed by the Executive Board member and Plans Panel Chairs and have been in place since 1 January 2016. Pre-application fees are becoming an increasingly valuable income stream and the service will continue to monitor and periodically review the pre-application enquiry service.

4.5 CSE reaccreditation

- 4.5.1 The customer services section within planning services has been the holder of the Customer Services Excellence standard (CSE) since 2009. This is a national government standard awarded to organisations which demonstrate that they are a customer centric organisation. The scope was broadened to include the wider planning service and the whole service was awarded CSE in 2014. CSE is not a one-off activity as the standard has been designed to drive continual improvement.
- 4.5.2 In March 2016, the service was reassessed against two categories of the standard and was re-awarded the CSE standard with no non-compliances. The service will continue to be externally assessed on an annual basis.

4.6 Web refresh

- 4.6.1 Following consultation with customers, elected members and officers, about the content on the planning webpages on the Leeds City Council website, a refresh of the pages is now in progress. The service is working closely with

the corporate web team to ensure that the content is organised and arranged in the most effective way possible.

- 4.6.2 There will be further testing work with focus groups prior to going live, to ensure the content is easily understandable and accessible.

4.7 Audit of planning decisions

- 4.7.1 Internal Audit undertook a review of the processes and systems in place for undertaking planning decisions in February 2016. The scope of the review was to obtain assurance that there was a robust system in place to ensure decisions in respect of planning applications were taken promptly and in accordance with all relevant legislation and guidance and that appropriate levels of income are collected and recorded. The audit concluded that Substantial Assurances were provided for both the control environment and compliance.

5 Challenges Ahead

5.1 Planning reform

- 5.1.1 The reform of the planning system at national level continues apace and the Housing and Planning Bill was enacted on 13 May 2016. The Council responded to the technical consultation in April expressing concern about starter homes, permission in principle / technical development consents and the introduction of competition into the processing of planning applications. The full implications of the new Act will be seen over time, but of particular concern is the starter home provisions where LPAs will be required to have regard to the provision of starter homes in determining planning applications. Starter homes are defined as new dwellings to be sold at a discount of at least 20% of market value and are available to first time buyers between the ages of 23 and 40 years of age. These changes are likely to reduce the delivery of traditional forms of affordable housing. The act also largely removes the requirement for affordable housing/ contributions from small sites (of 10 units for less or less than 1000 metres squared). The details will be published in regulations in due course.
- 5.1.2 The other area of challenge going forward are the provisions in the Act to introduce competition in the processing of planning applications. However, the Act makes it clear that the planning authority will still be responsible for the determination of planning applications. These changes have met with concern from local authorities and further regulations will set out the details. Time will tell whether this impacts on the processing of the remaining applications by local authorities and their budgets.

6 Corporate Considerations

6.1 Consultation and Engagement

- 6.1.3 This report is presented for information and there has not been the need for wide consultation.

6.2 Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration

6.2.1 There are no specific equality considerations arising from this report.

6.3 Council policies and City Priorities

6.3.1 The effective and expedient determination of planning applications contributes to the overall prosperity of the City and plays a key part in the regeneration and growth agenda. The service makes a key contribution to the delivery of housing growth, a priority in the Best Council Plan and one of the Breakthrough projects.

6.4 Resources and value for money

6.4.1 There are no specific implications arising from this report. However, measures are being taken to ensure that the service is delivered within the present financial climate and close monitoring occurs of the budget.

6.5 Legal Implications, Access to Information and Call In

6.5.1 There are no specific legal implications and this report does not relate to a key or major decision.

6.6 Risk Management

6.6.1 There are a number of risks associated with the decision making process which are both financial and reputational. Measures, processes and future service improvements outlined in the report seek to minimise the risk of challenge.

7 Conclusions

7.1 This year has seen a further significant improvement in performance in determination times on all types of applications, particularly major applications. Across all application types 93% of all applications were determined in time. Emphasis will continue to be placed on the efficient and expeditious determination of majors, use of Planning Performance Agreements and extensions of time agreements when it is clear that applications cannot be determined in the statutory timeframe.

7.2 Application numbers received in 2015-16 again increased for the fourth successive year, however the service saw the reduction in its staffing establishment again in the year with the service losing staff, including two senior managers. A close watch will be kept to ensure that there are sufficient resources to maintain the quality and speed of service necessary.

7.3 The service continues to move ahead with a number of service improvements and enhancements and focus will remain working with customers to provide an efficient planning service, whilst realising financial and operational efficiencies.

- 7.4 It is anticipated that the following year will bring new challenges; particularly once the new regulations have been published arising from the Housing and Planning Act. However, the direction of travel and objectives are clear in terms of transforming how we work, maintaining and improving performance levels and continuing to improve services to customers.

8 Recommendations

- 8.1 Members are asked to note the report and comment as they feel appropriate and to receive a further performance report in six months time.