

Agenda Item No:	9	
Committee:	Overview & Scrutiny	
Date:	30 May 2018	
Report Title:	2018 Planning Shared Service Annual Review	

1. Purpose/Summary

To update Overview and Scrutiny on the Shared Planning Service with Peterborough City Council since it was implemented in Autumn 2015.

2. Key Issues

- The Shared Service arrangement went live in January 2016 following Council approval of the proposal and governance arrangements and Staff Committee agreeing the shared structure.
- Performance indicators across both Councils are largely being met and resources are being shared across both teams and inter-authority trading takes place.
- The partnership has been a success and there are future opportunities for more synergies between the teams and opportunities for income generation.
- Over the next 12 months further development of the shared service will take place to ensure performance levels are maintained and income is generated in accordance with budget expectations.

3. Recommendations

That Overview and Scrutiny are requested to:

- Note the attached report.

Wards Affected	All
Forward Plan Reference	N/A
Portfolio Holder(s)	Cllr Dee Laws Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhood Planning Cllr Peter Hiller, Peterborough City Council , Cabinet Member for Growth, Planning, Housing & economic Development
Report Originator(s)	Nick Harding – Head of Planning Carol Pilson – Corporate Director
Contact Officer(s)	Nick Harding – Head of Planning Carol Pilson – Corporate Director
Background Paper(s)	None

4 Background

4.1 On the 23rd July 2015, Fenland District Council agreed to join a Shared Planning Service arrangement with Peterborough City Council after the Overview and Scrutiny Panel reviewed the proposal and business case at their meeting on the 13th July 2015. This proposal was built on the following key aims:

- To deliver efficiencies for both authorities.
- To maintain service delivery standards, and to improve them where possible and appropriate.
- To maintain individual 'sovereignty' for both Councils over planning delivery
- To ensure visibility to Members and customers of key staff.
- To maintain individual Council Planning Committees.

4.2 When the review was looked at by Overview & Scrutiny last year a number of actions were identified and these have been fulfilled as follows:

- Utilising opportunities further in the district to promote the area for more engaging recruitment campaigns – More comprehensive application packs have been developed and used to attract job applicants. This has resulted in 3 permanent Senior Planners (1 internal and 2 external) being successfully recruited and 1 Development Planner. We also now have a permanent Enforcement Team.
- To further explore opportunities to grow our own staff, around specific schemes, in relation to training and development and career opportunities and ensuring they are transparent so that people know what their progress might be once they are employed with us – Team members have been able to include in their caseload applications which challenge and stretch them in order to develop their skills and experience. Two officers have achieved promotion from the support team to become development management / compliance officers.
- To understand the reasons for staff leaving us and to build that into schemes so that we are learning potential lessons – Exit interviews are held as a matter of course.
- To work with the combined authority proactively to address the skills gap in North Cambridgeshire – Rather than work with the CA on this issue, the LGA Eastern England Group has established a protocol and the professional body for planning is establishing an apprenticeship model.

- To continue to utilise extensions of time appropriately – Their use has continued in an appropriate manner to facilitate enough time to ensure applications are of sufficient quality to attract an approval from officers or Members.
- To proactively communicate and manage expectations regarding the validation timescales, particularly if they are variable – Validation speeds have been consistent over the year and so such action has not been found to be necessary.
- To continue to work collectively and collaboratively with developers in order that sites and development continues – Good progress has been made with regard to the Broad Concept Plans for East Wisbech, East Chatteris as well as the approval of outline planning permission by Committee of the site for 1000 dwellings at South East Chatteris. Officers have worked with developers and agents as well as others on some informal flood risk guidance (approved at Council on 17 May) which will make dealing with flood risk more straightforward and recognise that a significant portion of the built up area in Wisbech is at risk of flooding but capable of being redeveloped.
- To update the Development Team Contact Details to include Planning Officers at both sites – list is regularly updated as and when staffing changes take place.

5 Scope of the Shared Service

5.1 The shared service arrangement comprises of the following:

- Sharing a single Head of Planning between both Councils
- Sharing a Technical Support Manager between both Councils
- The ability to buy and sell services between the Councils

5.2 In respect of the latter, the following has taken place to date:

- Fenland has sold to PCC planning policy officer time
- Peterborough has sold to Fenland: planning policy / neighbourhood planning officer time, development management officer time, technical support officer time, ecology officer time, Section 106 Management & development viability officer time.

5.3 It should be noted that each Council has their own:

- Development management teams
- Enforcement / compliance teams
- Technical support teams
- Conservation teams

5.4 Staff are based in their respective Council offices i.e. there is no co-location and officers do not have both Fenland Cases and Peterborough cases to deal with at the same time.

6 Development Management Performance

6.1 Speed of Validation

Table 1 - Percentage of applications validated in 5 days

FDC				PCC			
2014/5	2015/6	2016/7	2017/18	2014/5	2015/6	2016/7	2017/18
73%	73%	65%	83%	94%	83%	59%	45%

2016/17 saw a significant increase in performance at FDC which was mainly as a result of fewer days being lost to IT outages. At PCC, performance has continued to be weaker than desirable and this has been a result of difficulties in recruiting to the vacant posts. The job role was subject to re-evaluation and the vacancies were re-advertised. There is now a full complement of staff and performance is much improved over the average for the year.

6.2 Pre-applications

Table 2 - Response rate (within target) to pre-application enquiries

	FDC – 15 day min/oth target, 30 day target for majors		PCC – 30 day target	
	2016/17	2017/18	2016/17	2017/18
No of pre-application enquires	171	189	144	182
% responded to within target	75%	57%	90%	81%

The pre application service at FDC is more popular than that at PCC and the reason for this unable to be identified. The response times at FDC have been weaker than desirable and work needs to be undertaken to performance manage these more effectively. Notwithstanding this, priority has to be given the processing of planning applications.

6.3 Number of Planning Applications Submitted

Both Authorities have seen as a general trend a gradual increase in the number of applications being submitted which must be seen against an increase in the types of development that can take place without the need for planning permission. This demonstrates continued economic confidence in the area. Slightly fewer applications were received in Fenland in 2017/18 compared to 2016/17 but the fall is modest. It should be noted that although FDC received slightly fewer applications the value was greater, partly as a result in the 20% increase in planning fees being introduced by Government in January 2018.

In 2017, a Planning Inspector ruled at Appeal that the Council no longer had a 5 year land supply. The implications of this meant that when considering planning applications not all of the planning policies within the Local Plan could be given the weight they were given previously. It is pleasing to report, as Members are aware through the circulation of an all Member Briefing note, that the Council has regained its 5 year land supply and all Local Plan policies are now active.

Table 3 - Planning applications received from 2014 to January 2017

No of Applications Received	FDC	PCC
2014-15	1256	2145
2015-16	1338	2300
2016/17	1400	2427
2017/18	1372	2470

6.4 Planning Fee Income

In real terms the planning application fee income at PCC has fallen slightly if the 20 % increase in fee charges introduced at the beginning of the year is discounted. Even taking into account the fee increase, the fee income at FDC has increased. It continues to be challenging to produce accurate forecasts regarding fee income and new development proposals coming forward as the market is generally reserved about sharing its activity plans and when they do they cannot always be relied upon. However it can be reported that Planning fee income at FDC for April 2018 was £137,000 - £100k higher than April 2017 with 8 Major Applications received.

Table 4 - Planning Fee Income

	FDC				PCC			
	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2014	2015	2016/17	2017/18
Planning Application Income	£0.755	£0.743	£0.702	£0.806	£0.944m	£1.154m	£1.348m	£1.348m tbc
Pre-app Fee Income	n/a	n/a	£44k	£57k	£57k	£93.2k	£66k	£53k tbc

The pre-application service at FDC has proved to be exceptionally popular, more so than at PCC and the income at the former has outstripped the latter. The fee rates for the pre-application service are the same for both Councils and these are going to increase as a consequence of the national increase in planning fee rates.

6.5 Speed of Decision Making on Applications

Both Councils have maintained consistently good performance over the last 4 years. The Government targets for performance are being comfortably exceeded and neither authority is close to designation for weak performance.

Table 5 - Performance Measurements

Performance Measure	FDC				PCC			
	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
Major Applications decided in 13 weeks (or within extension of time agreement)	89%	91%	90%	97%	86%	96%	98%	95%
Minor applications decided in 8 weeks (or within extension of time agreement)	85%	85%	86%	93%	84%	90%	93%	97%
Other applications decided in 8 weeks (or within extension of time agreement)	93%	96%	97%	98%	92%)	93%)	96%	96%

6.6 Planning Appeals

Appeals performance has fluctuated over the last 3 years at both authorities. However, the number of appeals is modest and so consequently each appeal decision accounts for a significant percentage. Both Councils easily exceed new national performance standards so it can be said with confidence that the quality of decision making at each authority is good.

Table 6 - Appeals Performance

	FDC				PCC			
	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2014/15	2015/16	2017/18	2017/18
% Appeals Dismissed	88%	74%	70%	64%	70%	48%	82%	73%
No of allowed appeals that were committee over turns (total number of allowed appeals in brackets)	1 (2)	0 (5)	1 (6)	1(5)	2 (12)	4 (11)	0 (3)	0 (0)
Award of costs against LPA	0	2	2	1	0	0	1	0

6.7 Planning Compliance

Table 7 - Planning Compliance Performance

	FDC					PCC				
	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18		
No of Service Requests	336	289	363	330	530	505	619	511		
No of cases closed	291	369	357	359	590	552	575	501		

The number of service requests at FDC fell slightly compared to the previous year and case closer rates remained at a consistent level. Similarly the number of requests at PCC fell (but by a much larger amount) but there was a significant dip in case closure rates. This has been as a consequence of long term sickness in the team.

7 Budget Savings

- 7.1 As part of the shared service proposals it was a key objective for the Councils to make financial savings. The targeted savings have been successfully achieved as planned through:
- The sharing of the cost of the Head of Planning and the Technical Team Manager
 - A restructure of the service at Fenland District Council which was implemented prior to the start of the shared service.
- 7.2 Due to a number of staffing changes during the year and the difficulty in recruiting to posts, Fenland have continued to employ agency staff to assist in providing the service. Peterborough have also had to employ agency staff to cover for the increase in applications over the last two years and also long term sickness in the planning compliance team. At FDC this reliance is diminishing as we have successfully recruited permanent staff across Planning and Enforcement.

8 The Future of the Shared Planning Service

- 8.1 Over the next 12 months the Head of Planning will continue to ensure that the planning teams in both councils continue to improve and meet the performance indicators set out within in each organisation.
- 8.2 The teams will also continue to support the growth plans of both councils and specifically for Fenland support the delivery of Broad Concept Plans as set out in the Council's Local Plan and also Neighbourhood Plans.
- 8.3 The project to develop a co-location arrangement for the two technical teams has drawn to a close as a result of corporate ICT decisions at Peterborough which mean that a technical solution was not possible. In addition Peterborough has its agile working

agenda and Fenland has had its accommodation review. Notwithstanding, it would be worth revisiting the project in the future

- 8.4 The Shared Planning Board will also continue to look for further trading and income generation opportunities to support each Councils financial challenges particularly in the area of planning performance agreements.
- 8.5 FDC has committed to undertaking a Planning Advisory Service (PAS) Review as per the briefing note circulated to all Members. We are currently awaiting the confirmation of prospective dates from PAS in terms of the timetabling of the review and will keep Members updated throughout the process. Members will also have ample opportunity to input in to the review.

9 Conclusion

- 9.1 The shared service has operated successfully in terms of:
 - Performance against key indicators
 - The delivery of targeted savings
 - The trading of services between the two authorities
 - Improving the resilience of each authority's planning teams