

Meeting:	Strategic Planning Committee
Date:	25 th July 2007
Subject:	Development Management & Building Regulation Service Workload And Performance 2006/07
Key Decision: (Executive-side only)	No
Responsible Officer:	Andy Parsons, Head of Planning
Portfolio Holder:	Councillor Marilyn Ashton
Exempt:	No
Enclosures:	Appendix A : Development Control Improvement Strategy Appendix B : Planning Delivery Grant 2007/08 Appendix C : Barker Review – Case Study

SECTION 1 – SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This report outlines for members the work undertaken by Development Management & Building Regulation during the 2006/07 financial year and how the performance has measured up to the key performance indicators.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Committee is requested to note the report and the potential implications should the workload continue to increase.

SECTION 2 - REPORT

Background Information

- 5.1 Once again the year 2006/07 has seen a continuing increase in workload with a steady rise in applications in both Development Management and Building Regulation. A new computer system was introduced and efficiencies are starting to be realised. A new Committee structure comprising a Strategic Planning Committee to consider Major applications and a Development Management Committee to deal with the rest was successfully implemented. The need to respond efficiently to the significant flagship development proposals within the Borough continued unabated.
- 5.2 As a result of the budget situation, in both Development Management and Building Regulation, agency staff have been reduced and vacancies filled permanently where possible. Changes to processes, together with an internal restructuring has assisted in maintaining and improving performance levels. However, increasing demands on the service may threaten the progress made particularly if the ability to recruit and retain current and additional staff proves problematic in the future.
- 5.3 It is proposed that performance will be reported quarterly in order to keep members informed of progress in achieving service objectives.

Development Management

Planning Application Workload and Performance

- 5.4 The main Government indicator for development control performance for 2006/07 was the number of applications determined in 13 weeks for majors and 8 weeks for minor and other. As a result of improvements to procedures, the restructuring from area to functional teams, and the continuing commitment of the staff, performance has improved in all BV109 categories inspite of the continuing increase in numbers of applications received and determined. **Table 1** shows the figures for the past 10 years. In 2006/07 2863 applications were decided, compared to 2697 in 2005/06. Since 2002/03 there has been a 20% increase in numbers of applications, and last year alone represented a 12% increase on the previous year. **Table 2** shows how workload and performance have varied over the same period. National recognised benchmark of number of cases per officer is 150, Harrow is currently running at 209.
- 5.5 A restructure has taken place to align staff with the new Committee Structure which took effect in September 2006. This was undertaken in conjunction with a complete review of internal processes which has streamlined procedures and improved efficiency. This has resulted in considerable improvement in performance as can be seen when comparing 2002/03 with 2006/07 where case load per officer was at a similar level.

**Table 1: Harrow Development Management
Planning Application Workload
1997 - 2007
(end of March 2007)**

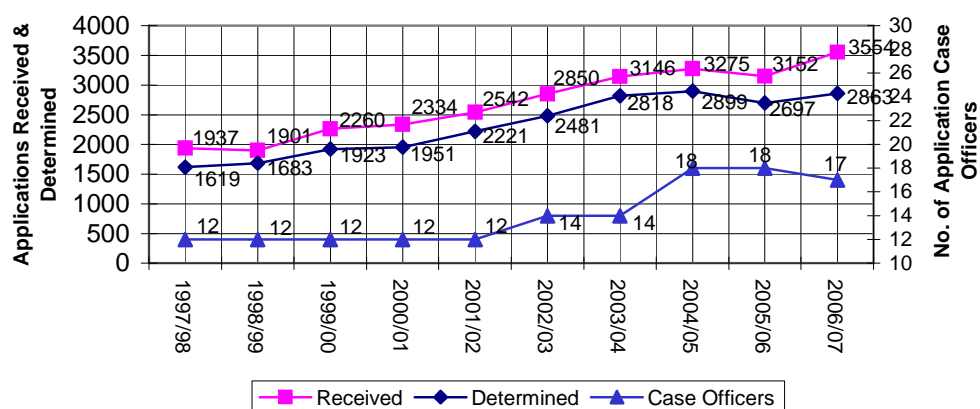


Table 2

	MAJOR	MINOR	OTHER	CASES PER OFFICER
	TARGET 60%	TARGET 65%	TARGET 80%	NATIONAL AVERAGE 150
2002-2003	32%	37%	63%	203
2003-2004	57%	37%	80%	224
2004-2005	67%	70%	88%	181
2005-2006	51%	72%	91%	175
2006-2007	73%	71%	86%	209
Q1 2007-2008	89%	86%	94%	209

5.6 Best Value Planning Authority

On 1st April 2007 Harrow was designated as a Best Value Planning Authority for major applications for 2007/08. This was due to performance on processing major applications to the year ending 30th June 2006 being below the Government's performance threshold of 60% for major applications determined within 13 weeks. Harrow's performance for the year to June 2006 was 51.25%.

5.7 Designation as a Best Value Planning Authority can affect the Council's overall CPA score and if improvements in performance are not made could lead to Government intervention.

5.8 The BV109 Trajectory and performance are provided in **Appendix A**. It should be noted that performance in Q2 2006-2007 was 37.5% and was the governing factor in not being able to achieve the 60% annual target. This was an abnormally low

figure when compared with 2005 Q4, 43% 2006 Q1, 62.5%, Q3 89%. The main contributing factors were the internal restructure to facilitate the new Committee Structure which commenced in September 2006, together with the introduction of more robust and streamlined procedures, which had a short term adverse impact before the benefits started to be realised.

- 5.9 Performance in Major applications for 2006-07 was 72.9%, the highest since the BV109 indicators were introduced. Performance in Q1 2007-08 was 89% which indicates that the improved performance has been sustained.
- 5.10 Current performance would strongly suggest that we would cease to be a Standards Authority in 2008-09.

Planning Delivery Grant (PDG) 2007-08) – First Tranche Allocation

- 5.11 The PDG for 2007/08 is being allocated in two parts. Harrow will receive £36,540 in PDG for the first tranche of allocations. This allocation is comprised of £36,540 for development control. This amount includes an abatement of -£4,060 on the basis of poor appeals performance. The department for Communities and Local Government letter of 21st May 2007 (Appendix B) explains the rationale and what is to be included in the second allocation due to be announced in July 2007, ie, DC performance between 1st July 2006 to 31st March 2007, plan making, sustainable development, e-planning and housing in high demand areas.
- 5.12 It should be noted that the amount of grant available to Local Authorities has been reduced significantly over the last few years and Government is still consulting on what will replace the existing PDG scheme after it has been phased out. Members will be updated when the Government proposals have been further developed.

Barker Review

- 5.13 Harrow's considerable improvements in performance has been recognised in the recently published Barker Review of Land Use Planning. The Government announced in 2005 Pre-budget Report that Kate Barker had been asked to lead an independent review of land use planning, focussing on the link between planning and economic growth. The Final report for the review was published on 5th December 2006. Harrow is one of only four Local Authorities that have been included as a case study demonstrating an excellent example of where significant improvements to performance have been achieved (**Appendix C**).

Appeals

- 5.14 Appeal activity has been relatively static, from 118 in 2005/06 to 119 in 2006/07. While the appeal workload can be very volatile the early months of this year seem to be following the 2006/07 levels. Appeal work is very labour intensive, and can have an impact on planning application performance. The level of success on appeal has been slowly increasing in recent years. The Government has set a target level of 35% and Harrow's performance is currently above this target, 50% 2005/06, 41% 2006/07, it has been at the upper end consistently.
- 5.15 The percentage of planning appeals allowed is monitored in BV204, which forms part of the Council CPA score. BV204 is currently in the lower quartile when compared with other Local Authorities, which has a negative impact on the

Council's overall CPA rating. As mentioned in paragraph 5.11 above, the poor appeals performance reduced the amount of PDG allocation by £4,060. This performance indicator was recognised by the Chief Executive and Chief Officers at a recently held Improvement Board, as an area that officers and members need to work on together in order to improve performance.

Building Regulations

- 5.16 There are no specific Government Performance Indicators for Building Control, but there is a well-established Benchmarking Regime within Building Control Authorities. One of the key indicators used for benchmarking is the percentage of applications checked within 3 weeks of submission. Performance in 2006/07 was 97%, as compared with 96% in 2005/06. Table 3 indicates key areas of performance.

Table 3

	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07
% applications checked within 15 days	96	96	97
Number of applications	2635	2362	2496
Number of applications per technical officer	219	175	227
Income	825K	917K	954K
London Benchmarking Rating	(top 25%) 4 th	(top 25%) 8 th	Not yet available
Number of initial Notices from Approved Inspections	69	65	102
% Marketshare	97.4%	97.25%	96%

- 5.17 Building Control Authorities are required to account for their charge earning activities separately, on the basis that the costs of providing the services should be recovered on a break even basis over a three-year period. Harrow has consistently made a surplus in excess of £100,000 per annum. The Government has indicated it may bring in regulations to restrict such surpluses in the future, requiring either fees to be reduced or surpluses to be re-invested into the Building Regulation service. The Audit Commission has been requested to consider this aspect when they carry out Local Authority Annual audits.
- 5.18 The Building Regulation Section has been developing partnership links with building/development companies which would enable them to submit all their plans to Harrow for checking, irrespective of where the proposal is located in the Country. This is providing valuable additional resources to the Service, but uncertainty with regard to the ability to attract and retain staff have limited this initiative to date. The number of partner companies increased by 3 to 11 at 1st April 2007.

5.19 Building Regulation staff started to proactively monitor compliance with Development Control permissions at the early stage of construction works on site. This has led to a significant number of potential breaches of planning permission being discovered and remedied at an early stage which is a benefit to both the client and community in general.

5.20 There continues to be a shortage of qualified Building Control Surveyors nationally and in particular in London. The filling of vacancies has ceased and covering peaks of workload by the use of agency staff has been reduced in order to work within budget.

6. Finance Observations

6.1 None

7. Legal Observations

7.1 None

8. Conclusion

8.1 Workload continued to increase in all areas of the service throughout 2006/7. The implementation of measures set out above has led to significant service improvements, but continuing improvement, and with it the potential to realise additional government grant for planning and income for Building Control, may well be prejudiced if resources do not keep pace with rising workload. In particular the ability to retain and recruit staff in an extremely competitive London environment remains a major concern, particularly as the 2012 Olympics starts to have an impact on the labour market.

8.2 To keep Members and the Public regularly informed of performance, Performance will be reported monthly to Members and will also be posted on the Intranet and the new Council website that is to be launched shortly.

SECTION 3 - STATUTORY OFFICER CLEARANCE

Name: Jessica Farmer

on behalf of the
Chief Financial Officer

Date: 10th July 2007

Name: Sheela Thakrar

on behalf of the
Monitoring Officer

Date: 12th July 2007

SECTION 4 - CONTACT DETAILS AND BACKGROUND PAPERS

Contact: Andy Parsons, Head of Planning, extn, 6206

Background Papers: List **only non-exempt** documents relied on to a material extent in preparing the report. (eg previous reports) Where possible also include electronic link.

IF APPROPRIATE, does the report include the following considerations?

1.	Consultation	NO
2.	Corporate Priorities	YES
3.	Manifesto Pledge Reference Number	

APPENDIX A

DEVELOPING A DEVELOPMENT CONTROL IMPROVEMENT STRATEGY: TRAJECTORY MODEL

AUTHORITY	Harrow Council
MONITORING OFFICER	Frank Stocks
EMAIL	frank.stocks@harrow.gov.uk
TELEPHONE	020 8424 1463

BV109 TARGETS: (by end of year)	2006/7	MAJOR	<input type="text" value="60%"/>	MINOR	<input type="text" value="65%"/>	OTHER	<input type="text" value="80%"/>
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PAST PERFORMANCE (Financial Year Calendar)

2000 - 2001		MAJOR	MINOR	OTHER
Q1	Apr - Jun	17.0%	48.0%	60.0%
Q2	Jul - Sep	33.0%	34.0%	55.0%
Q3	Oct - Dec	56.0%	41.0%	61.0%
Q4	Jan - Mar	14.0%	40.0%	47.0%
Annual Figure		28.0%	40.0%	56.0%
2001 - 2002		MAJOR	MINOR	OTHER
Q1	Apr - Jun	0.1%	24.0%	55.0%
Q2	Jul - Sep	37.0%	32.0%	62.0%
Q3	Oct - Dec	20.0%	40.0%	64.0%
Q4	Jan - Mar	33.0%	44.0%	68.0%
Annual Figure		24.0%	37.0%	62.0%
2002 - 2003		MAJOR	MINOR	OTHER
Q1	Apr - Jun	86.0%	40.0%	68.0%
Q2	Jul - Sep	25.0%	50.0%	67.0%
Q3	Oct - Dec	11.0%	46.0%	63.0%
Q4	Jan - Mar	18.0%	14.0%	50.0%
Annual Figure		32.0%	37.0%	63.0%
2003 - 2004		MAJOR	MINOR	OTHER
Q1	Apr - Jun	17.0%	35.0%	76.0%
Q2	Jul - Sep	64.0%	32.0%	83.0%
Q3	Oct - Dec	69.0%	30.0%	79.0%
Q4	Jan - Mar	71.0%	51.0%	83.0%
Annual Figure		57.0%	37.0%	80.0%
2004 - 2005		MAJOR	MINOR	OTHER
Q1	Apr - Jun	86.0%	68.0%	86.0%
Q2	Jul - Sep	50.0%	75.0%	88.0%
Q3	Oct - Dec	78.0%	68.0%	88.0%
Q4	Jan - Mar	50.0%	69.0%	93.0%
Annual Figure		67.0%	70.0%	88.0%
2005 - 2006		MAJOR	MINOR	OTHER
Q1	Apr - Jun	60.0%	73.0%	93.0%
Q2	Jul - Sep	56.0%	77.0%	91.0%
Q3	Oct - Dec	50.0%	75.0%	90.0%
Q4	Jan - Mar	43.0%	60.0%	89.0%
Annual Figure		51.0%	72.0%	91.0%
2006 - 2007		MAJOR	MINOR	OTHER
Q1	Apr - Jun	62.5%	76.7%	87.0%
Q2	Jul - Sep	37.5%	65.0%	83.0%
Q3	Oct - Dec	85.0%	68.8%	80.3%
Q4	Jan - Mar	76.0%	76.3%	91.0%
Annual Figure		72.9%	71.4%	85.6%

GUIDANCE FOR THE COMPLETION OF THIS FORM:

This spreadsheet model is intended as a way of monitoring BV109 performance relative to national targets. Specifically, it is designed to help plot and monitor progress over time. As data is entered, the spreadsheet will update several graphs illustrating the change relative to the required improvement trajectory.

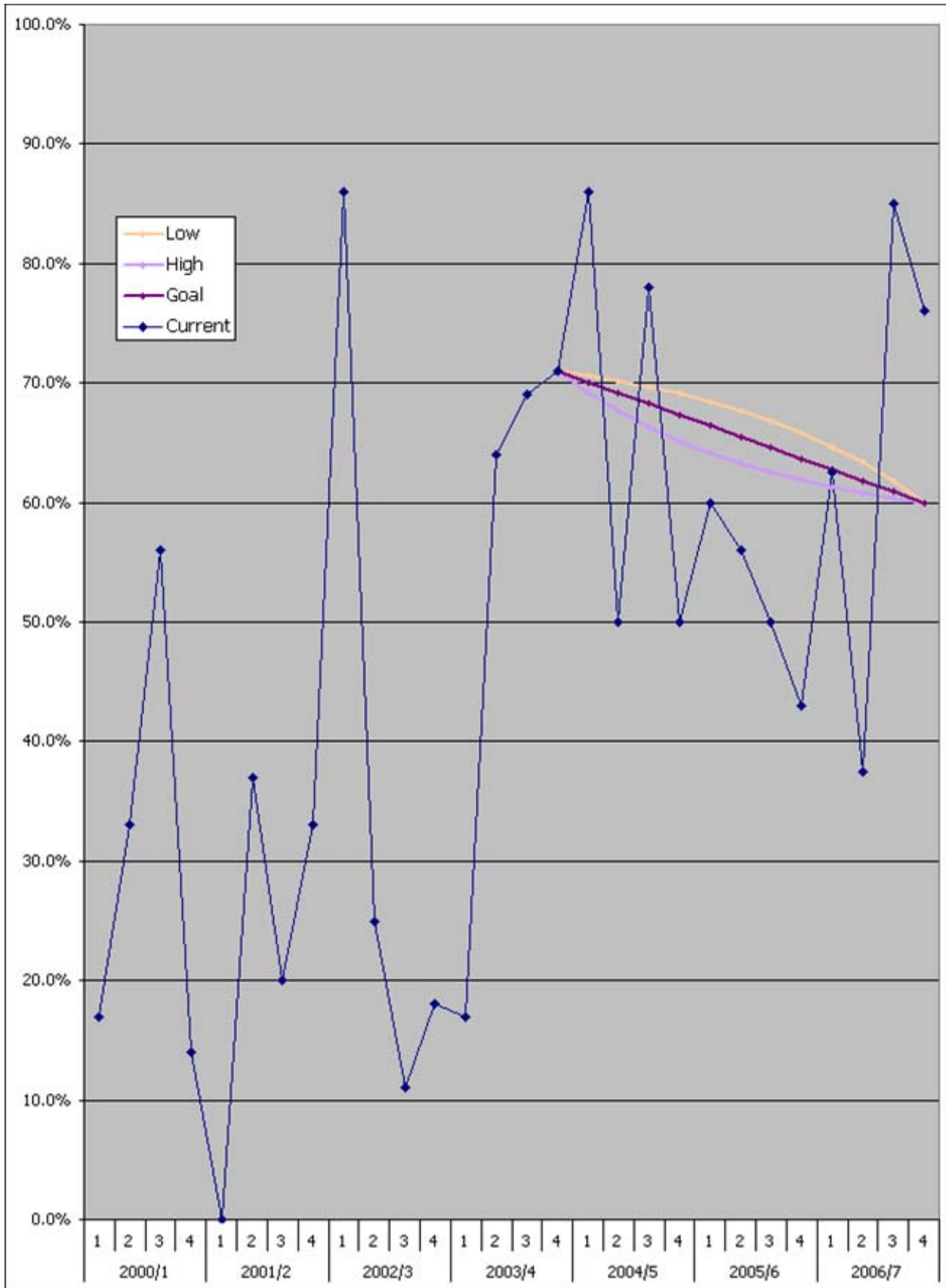
Only those areas of the spreadsheet shaded yellow should be completed. The remainder of the spreadsheet is protected to prevent accidental alterations. Only data that is entered will be graphed and analysed within the summary table. Where data has not yet been added the relevant parts of the graphs and summary table are blank.

The spreadsheet is designed to allow data illustrating historical change to be plotted from 2000/1 onwards. However, only the Q4 information from 2003/4 is required in order to calculate the goal trajectory for each graph. The goal trajectory is a straight line between the Q4 2003/4 information and the target performance level for the end of 2006/7, i.e. 60% for Major applications, 65% for Minors and 80% for Others. The goal trajectory remains based in Q4 of 2003/4 even as later data is added.

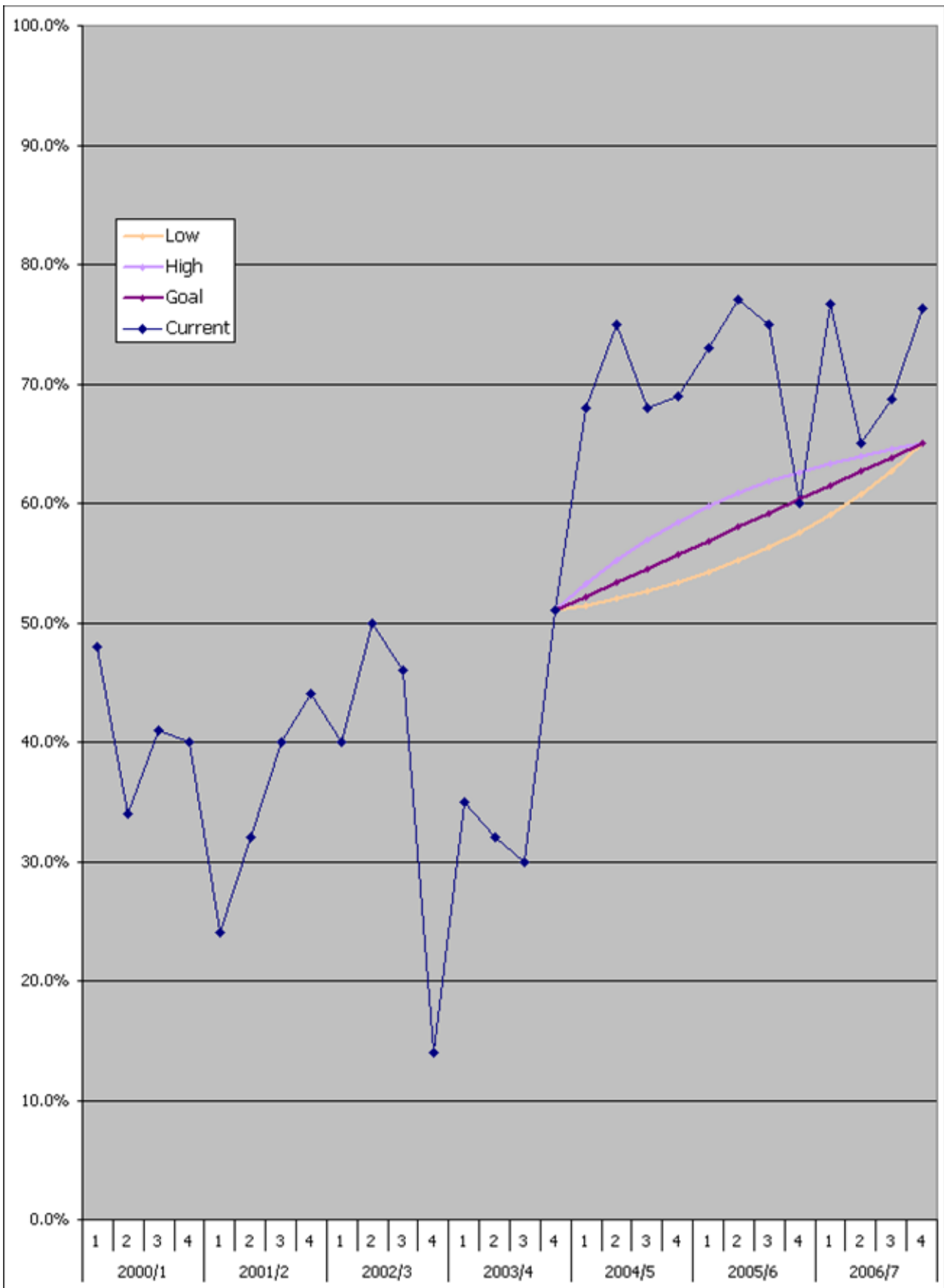
Either side of the goal trajectory on each graph are 'high' and 'low' curves that illustrate a reasonable margin of deviation from the goal trajectory, accepting that the rate of change and policy effect will vary from authority to authority. These are based upon a formula and so will vary in size and shape depending upon the slope of the goal trajectory.

The summary table provides an automatic assessment of emerging performance. To begin with, the table is blank. As future information is entered the table analyses this and gives the figure provided, the extent to which this deviates from the goal trajectory (in percentage points, with a negative value being above the goal trajectory and a positive value below it), and a ranking of either 'on target', 'above' or 'below' the overall trajectory (the area between the 'high' and 'low' curves).

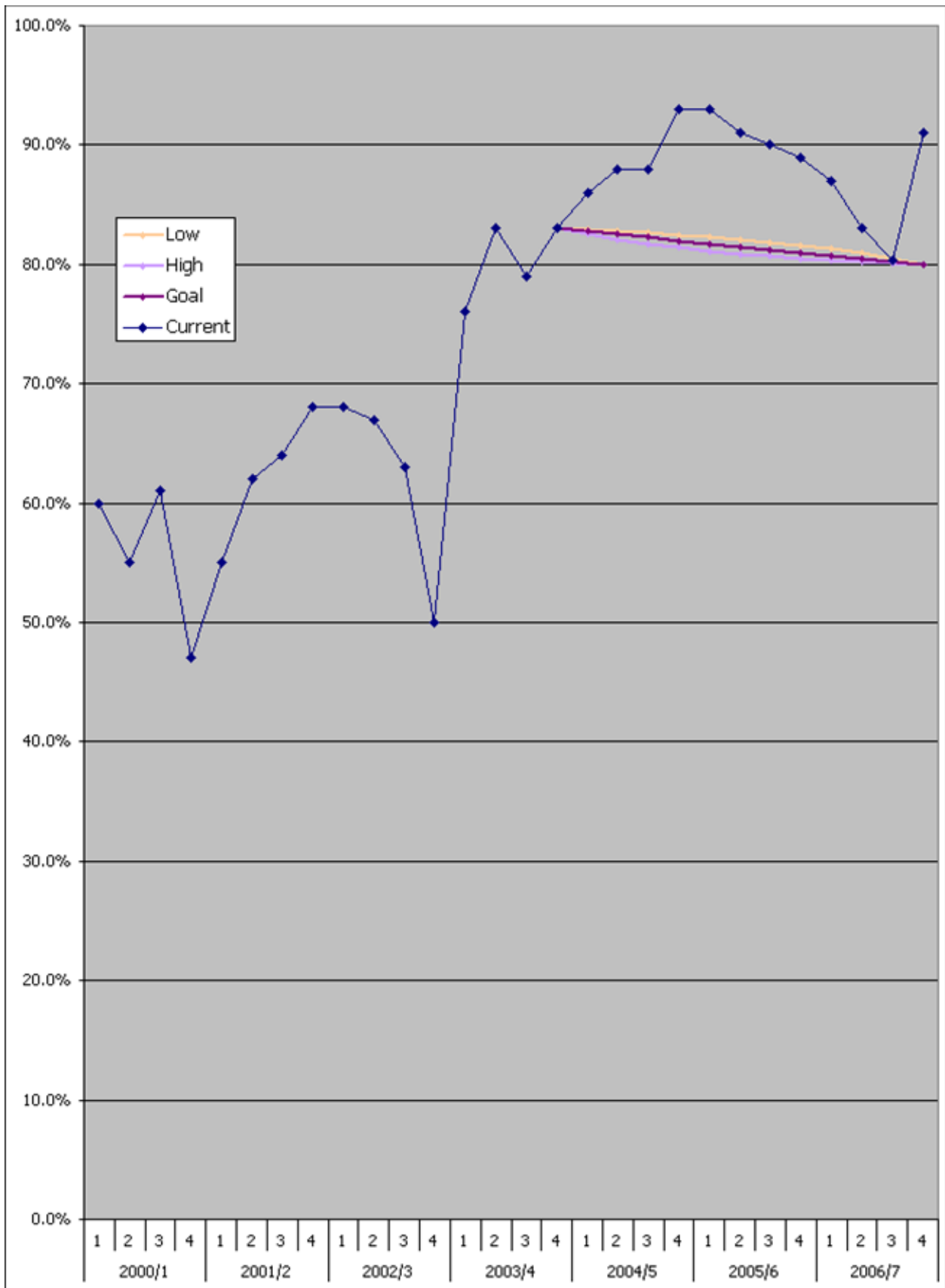
BV 109 TRAJECTORY - MAJOR APPLICATIONS



BV 109 TRAJECTORY - MINOR APPLICATIONS



BV 109 TRAJECTORY - OTHER APPLICATIONS



BV109: TRAJECTORY PROGRESS - SUMMARY TABLE

Authority: Harrow Council

Date of Report (for QA procedures for controlled or printed materials) 05/07/2007

	MAJOR			MINOR			OTHER			
	Actual	vs. Target	Progress	Actual	vs. Target	Progress	Actual	vs. Target	Progress	
2004/5	86.0									
Apr - Jun	%	-15.9%	ABOVE	68.0%	-15.8%	ABOVE	86.0%	-3.3%	ABOVE	
Jul - Sep	50.0	%	19.2%	BELOW	75.0%	-21.7%	ABOVE	88.0%	-5.5%	ABOVE
Oct - Dec	78.0	%	-9.8%	ABOVE	68.0%	-13.5%	ABOVE	88.0%	-5.8%	ABOVE
Jan - Mar	50.0	%	17.3%	BELOW	69.0%	-13.3%	ABOVE	93.0%	-11.0%	ABOVE
2005/6	Actual	vs. Target	Progress	Actual	vs. Target	Progress	Actual	vs. Target	Progress	
Apr - Jun	60.0	%	6.4%	BELOW	73.0%	-16.2%	ABOVE	93.0%	-11.3%	ABOVE
Jul - Sep	56.0	%	9.5%	BELOW	77.0%	-19.0%	ABOVE	91.0%	-9.5%	ABOVE
Oct - Dec	50.0	%	14.6%	BELOW	75.0%	-15.8%	ABOVE	90.0%	-8.8%	ABOVE
Jan - Mar	43.0	%	20.7%	BELOW	60.0%	0.3%	ON TARGET	89.0%	-8.0%	ABOVE
2006/7	Actual	vs. Target	Progress	Actual	vs. Target	Progress	Actual	vs. Target	Progress	
Apr - Jun	62.5	%	0.2%	ABOVE	76.7%	-15.2%	ABOVE	87.0%	-6.3%	ABOVE
Jul - Sep	37.5	%	24.3%	BELOW	65.0%	-2.3%	ABOVE	83.0%	-2.5%	ABOVE
Oct - Dec	85.0	%	-24.1%	ABOVE	68.8%	-4.9%	ABOVE	80.3%	-0.1%	ABOVE
Jan - Mar	76.0	%	-16.0%	ABOVE	76.3%	-11.3%	ABOVE	91.0%	-11.0%	ABOVE

Key:

Actual - Actual performance within the quarter (percentage of applications determined within the timescale)

vs. Target - the percentage point difference between the Actual performance and Target performance

Progress - assessment of Actual performance in terms of either 'above trajectory', 'on target', or 'below trajectory'

APPENDIX B



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21 May 2007

The Chief Executive:
County Councils in England
District Councils in England
Unitary Authorities in England
London Borough Councils
Council of the Isles of Scilly
The Broads Authority
The Town Clerk, City of London
The National Park Officer,
National Park Authorities in England.

Our Ref: PLANDC 7/1/3

Dear Colleague,

Planning Delivery Grant 2007/08 – Finalised First Tranche Allocations

I am pleased to inform you that Baroness Andrews OBE, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Department for Communities and Local Government has finalised the 2007/08 Planning Delivery Grant first tranche allocations worth £28.8 million. Today's announcement covers allocations for Enterprise Areas, Housing Renewal Pathfinders and development control, and abatements for poor performance at appeal. The grant has also been topsliced by £9m to help support Regional Planning Bodies and a number of national initiatives.

You may be aware that this year the grant will be paid in two parts. The announcement today covers the proposed first tranche of awards for performance in respect of meeting the development control targets on the speed of handling planning applications (Best Value Performance Indicator 109) in the year ending June 2006. These awards amount in total to £14.5 million with a further allocation of £500,000 in respect of mineral and waste applications. We propose that the second tranche of awards for development control will be worth a further £43 million. We intend to make provisional allocations of this tranche in July 2007 and the tranche will be based on performance over the period 1 July 2006 - 31 March 2007 with a proposed bonus of at least £50,000 when all three development control targets for Major, Minor and Other applications are met.

As in previous years, development control allocations have been reduced for authorities whose performance in defending appeals is below the national average of 33.26%. The abatement is 10% when appeal performance is greater than or equal to 140% but less than 150% of the national average and 20% when appeal performance is greater than or equal to 150% of the national average. This is to ensure that the grant is not rewarding poor quality decisions.

Department for Communities and Local Government
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Regional Planning Bodies (RPBs) have received a joint allocation totalling £3 million to support their work preparing regional spatial strategies and in recognition of the additional work which the strengthened regional planning function involves. These allocations will not be abated as RPB performance against business plans has been satisfactory. The remaining £6 million of the grant will be used to support a number of national initiatives and this is broken down as follows: the Planning Advisory Service and the Advisory Team for Large Applications have been allocated £2 million each, for their work supporting local authority planning performance; £1 million has been allocated to the Planning Inspectorate for its work on Local Development Plan preparation; £1 million has been allocated for post-graduate planning bursaries to increase capacity in local planning authorities and finally, the Greater London Authority (GLA) receives £50,000 for its contribution to improving planning in London. The award is based on performance against the GLA's business plan, and is given in recognition of work on: sub-regional development frameworks; completion of strategic planning guidance documents; the Housing Capacity Study; and implementation of the London Plan.

The grant aims to provide additional funding to enable local authorities to improve their planning resources and introduce the many changes which the government is bringing in as part of its programme to reform planning. PDG is not ring-fenced, but local authorities are encouraged to reinvest the money in their planning services. To encourage this reinvestment, there is a condition that 25% of each local authority's grant must be capital expenditure.

This announcement does not cover progress on plan-making and sustainable development, e-planning and housing in high demand areas. That allocation will be worth approximately £90 million and we plan a provisional announcement in July 2007, when we will have the data necessary to calculate these areas.

You can find your authority's allocations on the Department for Community and Local Government website at <http://www.communities.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1143674>. I have copied this letter to your Chief Planning Officer.

Yours sincerely,



David Morris
Deputy Director

LOCAL AUTHORITY PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT CASE STUDIES

Introduction

a) Development control performance has been a particular concern for the review. There are some excellent examples of where local authorities have made significant improvements to their performance. The review team spoke to four such authorities – Windsor and Maidenhead, West Berkshire, Mid Devon and Harrow - in more detail to find out what they did to improve efficiency and what were the critical factors in driving the improvements forward. All these authorities had previously been standards authorities. This annex summarises these factors and outlines each case briefly.

b) The authorities used different combinations of measures to implement changes and these are outlined in box X and the profiles below. The critical success factors in driving these forward were:

- **Relationships with members.** On some issues it is hard to get members to understand or relinquish control. Building better relationships with some members and having them championing planning helped. A good way to see if things work is to get members to agree to pilot certain schemes – like increased delegation.
- **Investment from the Planning Delivery Grant** was essential in being able to increase resources. The authorities feel that they would like to set their own fees and be self-financing. They feel that they could use the same model as Building Control. Some are concerned that there will be a battle to keep resources if PDG money is taken away. Particularly as the LDF process is now being development and it is resources intensive.
- **Strong leadership** was an important component of raising the status of planning within authorities. All cases had a new head of planning and in some cases a corporate planning role was created.
- **Corporate support** often came hand in hand with strong leadership, particularly where there was a corporate role for planning. Corporate support was essential in the changes made to planning departments.
- **Targets** are good for focusing minds. They are useful in presenting a case for resources and they are good for presenting progress diagrammatically that has an effect on motivation. Monitoring individual performance is a great management tool because it helps to identify and manage problems. The majors target threshold is too low, this definition needs to be revisited. However, there was a feeling that there are too many targets and it is hard to prioritise. Some felt that the targets are too focused on urban areas and do not allow for local circumstances. For many the ‘majors’ target is problematic because of the difference between 10 units of housing and a power station.

Box X: Examples of action taken to improve performance:

- **Improvement plans** gave structure for improvement activity and helped to get member buy-in.
- **Resource** issues were addressed through: new and more flexible ways of working (like working from home and hotdesking), restructuring teams, recruitment (often using PDG funds), retention initiatives (such as growing own planners through on the job training and cross team working, day release for formal qualifications and creating more room for personal development).
- **Efficiency** became tantamount. Backlogs were dealt with so officers were free to concentrate on new applications. Administrative teams were restructured around validation and despatch. Process reviews were undertaken: delegation schemes were simplified, 'hit' teams were created to chase up applications due for completion, flexible support, unilateral agreements used instead of s106s,
- **Customer management**, like a dedicated customer service manager and call centres took away burdens from planners. Increased use of pre-application discussions, sometimes with fees. Planning advice and customer service teams were also effective. E-planning developments also assisted, allowing applicants to track progress online.
- **Improved communications** also featured heavily with the department sharing information about workloads and achievements, which encouraged more teamworking. Use of newsletters, team meetings, team updates on performance and education about changes in national policy were all used.
- **Environment** some authorities made improvements to the planning departments through re-positioning teams and others moved into new premises. One authority even used PDG money to update the office furniture and create an open-plan office space.

The Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead

- Background** c) The authority receives about 3000 applications a year in an area of strong policy restraint.
- Performance issues** d) The council was losing staff and had no chance of meeting targets. Officer time was taken up doing administration and handling complaints. The team was split across two offices – one in Windsor and one in Maidenhead.
- Actions taken Improvement** e) A new head of planning was introduced. An improvement plan was developed and the planning service became a pilot within the council for the ‘Delivering Excellence’ scheme. The planning teams were brought together into one location and, internally, the team was positioned to replicate the workflow of an application. A hot desking system was introduced and officers were allowed to work from home when appropriate to cut commuting time. To focus minds on performance each individual officer was given a development plan and all training was checked for relevance. The council realised it was important to grow their own planners and introduced on the job training including work shadowing and cross team working. To reduce the time spent managing customers a customer service team of five people was put in place. Alongside this a tailor made dashboard system enables applicants to track their applications online, an officer to chase s106 payments, and a pre-application service were all introduced.
- Outcomes** f) The authority came off ‘standards’ for all types of applications in one go. Further improvements could be made with a higher rate of delegation; currently about 10 per cent of applications still go to panel.

Mid Devon District Council

- Background** g) Mid Devon is a small rural authority with the local economy being mainly comprised of agriculture and tourism with some industry. The authority deals with about 35-45 major applications per year; the majority of applications are others (about 50%).
- Performance issues** h) The department was under resourced and over worked with high turnover. There was a huge backlog of applications which was a drain on officers time. At the end of 2002 it was a Standards Authority. A new head of planning joined at this time. The department was under resourced and overworked. Huge backlog of applications in the system which was taking a lot of the officers time, not allowing them to concentrate on new applications. 170 of these applications were over 13 weeks old. At the end of 2004 4 planners left the department due to an increase in demand for planners within local authorities generally. The department was working with only 50% of professional roles filled at one point and retention became a key issue. Very complicated scheme of delegation which was not user friendly.
- Actions taken** i) A new head of planning started and wanted to instil a strong team work ethic into the team. A move to new premises also helped with team cohesion. The backlog was tackled so officers could focus on new targets. Hiring new planners and implementing a system for ‘growing your own’ talent addressed resource issues. The department was reorganized into three area teams, which made more room for promotion by creating more higher grade posts. The administrative team was split into dispatch and validation. A focus on performance was created through monthly, quarterly and annual monitoring. As well as individual performance reviews. An improved IT tracking system also contributed. A number of process improvements were also implemented including blitz meetings to tackle large volumes of applications in one go, a simplified delegation system and the use of e-planning tools. A range of communication tools were used to improve relations and a customer services officer post was created to ensure planning officer time was not wasted.

Outcomes j) By mid-2004 the department was at full staffing compliment. The head of the department feels that the quality of staff is excellent. Good retention and lots of promotions within the planning department. The ODPM target for improved performance was June 2005, they had met this target by May 2005. This performance has been maintained since then, and the head of planning feels that this performance will not improve further unless there are alterations to the system at national level. Applications speeds improved from 2001/02 majors 27%, minors 31%, others 53% to 04/05 majors 62%, minors 68%, others 83%. In 10/05 majors 100%, minors 79%, others 94%. They have a good system of delegation; pre 1993 about 87% went to committee now about 94% are delegated to officers.

West Berkshire Council

Background k) West Berkshire Council is a unitary authority responsible for the full range of local authority services. It was created in April 1998 when the former Newbury District Council took on responsibilities from Berkshire County Council, which was abolished. In May 2001 the Council introduced a new way of conducting business - a modernised political decision-making structure to replace the committee system which had been in existence for over 100 years. This new model had been chosen following extensive public consultation which resulted in a majority of local residents supporting the Leader with Cabinet model. Mainly rural with only a small amount of urban area, 75 per cent is Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. West Berkshire could fit this urban growth on brownfield land, but this would detract from the quality of the environment.

Performance issues l) Tensions between members and officers, increase in applications, limited resources, complaints about poor performance and turnover resulted in West Berkshire becoming a standards authority. Traditional problem with planning was tension between members and officers. The local authority was making financial cuts, which were effecting the planning and environment department. There was a 25% increase in applications over a three-year period. At the worst the council was only processing 2 per cent of applications within the target timescales. Limited resources and poor IT systems, which meant that officers had two PCs on their desks at once, led to poor performance. Poor performance meant a large amount of complaints, which then created a further time drain on already overloaded resources. The department was difficult to manage and in a two-year period there were four different heads of planning. Finding planners with good management expertise proved difficult. Members were reluctant to put money into planning. In the development control team 50 per cent of their positions were vacant and five out of sixteen staff were off work with stress. Moral was low. Planners were dealing with about 350 cases, when it has been suggested that about 150 is manageable.

Actions taken m) A new head of planning joined the team and a corporate role for planning was created. Officers were promoted on their management ability and the department focused on developing planners internally. All non-planning tasks were taken away from qualified officers; a call centre and registration team contributed to this. Rigorous process reviews were undertaken and a tariff-based system for managing s106s was created. Member relations were seen as a really important part of the improvements, with members taking ownership over a part of the improvement plan. In addition, a member reference group, chaired by the CE, was created. Flexible working was also used which allowed officers quite time away from the office. PDG funding was essential in providing additional resources.

London Borough of Harrow

Background n) Harrow is located in the north-east of the West London Sub-Region, identified in the London Plan as the 'Western Wedge', and a vibrant part of the London economy. The sub-region will see continued growth, both in population and employment terms, in the foreseeable

future. Harrow will be expected to accommodate an appropriate share of this growth. There is considerable partnership working between a wide range of agencies, bodies and groups in the sub-region, and importantly the 6 local authorities which comprise the West London Alliance. Various strategies, plans and programmes on a variety of subject matters are developed jointly between the Boroughs.

Performance issues o) Planning was seen as a regulatory function and had a lack of experienced staff and inefficient processes. Between 1998-2004 there was extremely poor performance. Planning was not seen as a priority, merely a regulatory function, within the Council and it became a Standards Authority. Members often took the view that local politics were most important and planning was not considered a strategic function to implement policies. The Best Value Review in 2001 gave the department a one star with uncertain prospects for improvement. There was a lack of experienced staff in the department and limited up-and-coming potential. Systems and procedures were not as efficient as they should have been, but there was little time to address them due to officers carrying caseloads of over 220 against the recommended 150.

Actions taken p) A new corporate role for planning was created and the improvement plan was a good way of focusing members on the issues. This combined with a new head of planning helped raise the status of planning within the council. PDG funding was used to good effect. IT improvements enabled a maximum e-government score of 21 Pendleton points to be achieved. The council was able to develop a better recruitment and retention package that could compete effectively within a very competitive market. Staff were educated about the importance of performance and customer focus. Teams were restructured around targets (major, minor, other) to help create a performance culture. All systems and procedures were reviewed and a planning advice team was created to improve efficiency. Career development is now an important part of working in the department and officers are encouraged to work across teams to learn new skills.

Outcomes q) The team restructuring and cultural change had a big impact on improvements. Targets are now being met, although major applications are still a concern due to low numbers received and increasing complexity. The authority now feels that relative to other services planning provides good value for money.