

HARROW COUNCIL

Meeting:	Environment & Economy Scrutiny Sub-Committee
Date:	11 March 2004
Subject:	Best Value Review of Planning Services
Key decision:	No
Responsible Chief Officer:	Report of Chief Planning Officer
Relevant Portfolio Holder:	Planning, Development & Housing
Status:	Part I
Ward:	All
Enclosures:	Report to Development Control Committee 10 December 2003

1. **Recommendations** (for decision by the Environment & Economy Scrutiny Sub-Committee)

1.1 That the Sub-Committee note the report.

2. **Consultation with Ward Councillors**

2.1 None.

3. **Policy Context (including Relevant Previous Decisions)**

3.1 See attached report to Development Control Committee.

4. **Relevance to Corporate Priorities**

4.1 This report addresses the Council's priorities of enhancing the environment and developing a prosperous and sustainable economy.

5. **Background Information and options considered**

The Best Value Review of the Planning Service was undertaken in the Autumn of 2001 and the report of the Best Value Inspectorate was received in March 2002. The Planning Service was assessed as 'fair' (one star) with 'uncertain' prospects for improvement. A copy of the Summary and Recommendations is attached at Appendix 5.

A 5 year Best Value Improvement Plan for Planning Services was already in place at the time of inspection and has formed the basis for action to meet both the conclusions of the Review and to meet Government Performance targets.

Significant improvements in performance against BVPIs have been achieved since the inspection and these must be set against continuing increases in workload, in particular the constant upward trend in the numbers of planning applications (12% in 2002/03). Improvement was also hampered by difficulties in recruitment and retention, with high levels of staff turnover and temporary and agency staff.

In spite of improvements, perceived poor performance against Government targets has resulted in Harrow being 'named and shamed' as a 'planning standards authority'. As a result, ODPM consultants are coming to review the service in March and will be working with the officers to prepare an updated improvement plan. They have already identified a number of issues they feel need to be addressed, including the very high caseload carried by Development Control staff. Currently this stands at 245 applications per officer per annum compared with a 'norm' of 150.

Attached for members' consideration is the annual report for the Planning Service for the year 2002/03 which was reported to the Development Control Committee in December and the UDP Panel in January 2004.

6. **Consultation**

6.1 None.

7. **Finance Observations**

7.1 Contained within Development Control Committee report.

8. **Legal Observations**

8.1 Contained within Development Control Committee report.

9. **Conclusion**

9.1 This report and the annual monitoring report sets out the progress made by the Planning Service since the Best Value Report in 2002. While improvements are evident, there is still much to be done to meet Government and Council targets and objectives. A completely revised improvement plan, to replace the Best Value Improvement Plan, is in the course of preparation which will set out the changes required and the resource implications.

10. **Background Papers**

10.1 Development Control Committee report.

11. **Author**

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