

## LONDON BOROUGH OF HARROW

<b>Meeting:</b>	<b>Development Control Committee Unitary Development Plan Advisory Panel</b>
<b>Date:</b>	10 <sup>th</sup> December 2003 5 <sup>th</sup> January 2004
<b>Subject:</b>	Planning Services Annual Monitoring Report 2002/03
<b>Key Decision:</b>	No
<b>Responsible Chief Officer:</b>	Chief Planning Officer
<b>Relevant Portfolio Holder:</b>	Planning, Development , Housing and Best Value
<b>Status:</b>	Part I
<b>Ward:</b>	All
<b>Enclosures:</b>	Appendix 1 – End of year statement 2001/2002 Appendix 2 – End of year statement 2002/2003 Appendix 3 – Planning Application Workload 1989-2003 - Planning Application Performance 1989-2003

### 1. Summary / Reason for Urgency (if applicable)

- 1.1 The performance monitoring statement for the first six months of 2002/03 was circulated to Members in January this year. The end of the year statement is attached. A commentary on the statement is set out below, which in particular examines performance against key indicators and targets, implications for Planning Delivery Grant (PDG) for 2004/05 and the implications for the 'naming and shaming' of the Council as a 'planning standards authority'. The report also reviews workload trends and the implications in all service areas of increasing applications, legislative changes and regional/sub-regional working.

To ensure members are aware of the workload/financial issues in advance of service planning decisions for 2004/05.

### 2. Recommendation (for decision by the Development Control Committee)

- 2.1 The Committee is recommended to note the report and the potential implications for meeting strategic targets and PDG.

FOR DECISION

REASON: To ensure that members are aware of current workload and performance issues.

### **3. Consultation with Ward Councillors**

3.1 None

### **4. Policy Context (including Relevant Previous Decisions)**

4.1 Previous Monitoring Reports and ODPM Best Value and Planning Delivery Grant Advice.

### **5. Relevance to Corporate Priorities**

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

### **6. Background Information and Options Considered**

6.1 Once again, the trend in numbers of planning and building control applications has been upwards, with a 12% increase in planning applications received and a 15% increase in building control. This pattern has continued on into the current year. The pressures to improve performance, to meet Government and local Best Value Performance Indicators and to accommodate increasing workload puts increasing strain on the services, at a time when recruiting and retaining staff is proving very difficult.

During the year to March 2003, the primary objective in policy was to prepare for the UDP Inquiry, which took place in February-April. The process was managed successfully, with pre-inquiry negotiations resulting in many objections being withdrawn and the matters to be determined by the Inspector reduced to manageable levels. At the same time, there has been increased pressure to initiate, support and develop area and site specific work for regeneration and town centres, development of major sites and to support the New Harrow Project. A number of major applications involving conservation areas and listed buildings placed demands on conservation resources limiting the time available for pro-active work on policy and site specific issues, and this has followed on into the current year with a series of high profile public inquiries.

#### **6.2 Development Control**

As mentioned above, 2002/03 saw a 12% increase in the numbers of planning applications received, and the numbers of applications determined showed an 11.4% increase. This clearly represents a significant increase in workload. Two additional posts were created in development control as a result of the increased budget provision and these together with the restructuring into Delegated and Committee teams enabled the workload to be managed, but not to improve application-handling times significantly from 2001/02. While the first three quarters of the year showed consistent improvement, unprecedented turnovers of staff in the last quarter (Jan-March 2003) resulted in poor figures which dragged down the overall year's performance. Since that time, new permanent staff have been appointed, and with a more settled situation and reduced temporary cover, the first six months of the current year are showing much better figures. However, the staffing situation in

London and the South East remains very volatile and the position can change very quickly.

The Government is expressing particular concern over performance on major applications (DC6). The numbers of such applications increased during 2002/03 and have continued to increase in the current year. New monitoring mechanisms have now been put in place to manage performance which are producing a quicker turnround, but there have been a number of large, complex and controversial schemes submitted which are very difficult to deal with within 13 week, particularly where they involve S106 agreements. These agreements can lead to protracted negotiations with developers over the terms of the agreement. In other cases the developer delays the point at which they enter in to the agreement for as long as possible. This puts much greater pressure on ensuring that the more straightforward major schemes are determined within the timescale. Revised working arrangements are being developed to deal with these issues as quickly as possible and in some cases before the matter goes to committee.

The 'minor' applications category continues to give cause for concern. While the revised delegation arrangements have been fully operational since October and will assist to an extent in improving the performance, they will not put the Council in a position to meet the Government target of 60% in 8 weeks. As long as significant numbers of such applications still fall to Committee for decision, this target will be difficult to achieve.

The number of responses to notifications (DC15) increased by over 20% during the year, indicating an increase both in public interest in planning issues and resultant workload.

Members should also appreciate that improvements in meeting targets for determining applications have been in part achieved through reducing scope for negotiating amendments. While applicants are given the opportunity to amend schemes where straightforward changes would result in recommendation for approval, they are given deadlines for submission which if not met will result in refusal. Obviously unacceptable schemes will result in early refusals. Wherever possible, informatives are attached to refusal decision notices explaining what can be done to achieve an acceptable scheme. For householder applications, the Supplementary Planning Guidance approved earlier this year provides very clear and detailed guidance, and this is widely available.

### 6.3 **Forward Planning**

The UDP Inquiry finished in mid-April 2003 and the Inspector's Report was received in August. The preparation for the Inquiry was the key priority task for Forward Planning staff for most of 2002/03. As a result, many of the objections were resolved through discussion and negotiation prior to Inquiry, reducing Inquiry time. This has subsequently resulted in relatively small number of issues to be dealt with through amendment and modification.

Monitoring of key performance indicators showed a near 50% increase in permissions for new dwellings together with a doubling of the percentage of affordable units permitted from 22.4% to 45%. This was mainly as a result of a

number of large high density affordable housing schemes being approved late in the year, including the Rayners Lane Estate development and sites in Wealdstone. 100% of new development was approved on previously developed land.

During the course of 2002/03 six new conservation area policy guidelines were approved, bringing the total to 18 out of a possible 28. Projects at Canons Park (now with a new post funded from Heritage Lottery Fund grant), the Harrow on the Hill Heritage Regeneration Scheme and Headstone Manor have all been progressed, although Headstone Manor has been the subject of delay. Major applications (and subsequent appeals) at the Kings Head, East End Farm and Harrow Hospital have proved very resource intensive for the Conservation Section, particularly in the current year.

The Research and Information workload was intensive following the availability of the 2001 Census results. A start has been made in analysing results as they are released and this work will be continuing through 2003/04. Contributions to the preparation of the 'Vitality Profiles' in support of the New Harrow Project enabled the South Harrow Pilot to be launched in April 2003, and again this work is continuing as NHP is rolled-out in further areas.

Town Centre Strategy and development has taken a much higher profile, with a draft Town Centre Strategy agreed for consultation in April 2003. Support for the Wealdstone Regeneration initiatives also continued through the year, in particular in respect of the Wealdstone Centre proposals and key housing sites.

2002/03 was also the year which saw Government proposals for the reform of the Planning System, which resulted in many consultation documents from ODPM to be considered. The completion of the statutory processes for the new Town Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act in 2004 will bring with it a fundamental change in development planning, with a more intensive and shorter timescale for producing plans which will have resource implications.

The Mayor's London Plan was the subject of an Examination in Public (EIP) in the latter part of 2002/03. The response to consultation and preparing and presenting evidence to the EIP on behalf of both the Borough and the West London Alliance represented a significant additional workload. This will continue with the preparation of Sub-Regional Development Frameworks.

#### 6.4 **Planning Standards Performance**

The Government identified Harrow as a 'Planning Standards' authority for 2002/03, based on our performance for dealing with applications in 2000/01. The Government expected Harrow to deal with 50% of 'minor' applications within 8 weeks and 65% of 'other' applications. The actual performance was 37% and 61% accordingly. The difficulties in meeting these figures are outlined in the above paragraphs. As a result, consultants working for ODPM are scrutinising the Council's performance for report back to Government on whether any further action should be taken. They have had a comprehensive set of documents/statistics and an explanation of the difficulties of meeting performance levels at a time of consistently increasing workload and recruitment and retention difficulties. The outcome of their study should be more available to the Council in the New Year.

The Council has also been identified as a 'Planning Standards' authority for 2003/04, on the basis of the performance on 'major' applications. The target set is 50% determined within 13 weeks. On the basis of the first six months performance (42%), this may be achievable. However, there have been a number of large, complex applications received recently which will impact on performance. Any applications requiring a S106 agreement are extremely unlikely to be determined within the time limit.

#### **6.5 Planning Delivery Grant (PDG)**

Members will be aware that in January 2003 the Council was awarded a total of £252,000 Planning Delivery Grant, based on the improvement in DC performance from September 2001 to September 2002. A report outlining how this was to be spent was considered at DC Committee and Cabinet earlier this year.

For next year, the PDG allocations are being made again on the basis of DC performance, from September 2002 to September 2003, and also for Development Plan progress. For DC performance, the award is likely to be minimal (if any) as it will be based on improvement over the period, which for reasons explained above, was not the case in Harrow. The criteria and timing for the policy element is not yet known, but the latest information suggests that it will not be available until later in 2004.

Much of the PDG award for this year has been directed towards DC staffing and the benefits of this are showing clearly in the improvement in performance in the first six months of 2003/04. However, unless this funding is continued for 2004/05 there is a real danger that this progress will be lost.

#### **6.6 Building Control**

The situation in Building Control reflected that in Development Control, with a near 15% increase in Full Plans applications received. Apart from a period early in the year when staffing was particularly difficult, performance has been maintained at a consistently high levels (Indicators BC1-BC3).

The increase in plans deposited was accompanied by a similar increase of 12% in the number of site inspections carried out during the year, and a slight increase in the numbers of inspections per job (BC17 and BC18). The numbers of applications dealt with per officer and number of site visits per officer also increased slightly.

The number of applications lost to the private Approved Inspectors was down by over 25% both in the domestic and commercial sectors (BC 26 & BC 29). Due to the overall number of applications being on the increase, the improvement in market share can be judged to be the result of an effective marketing strategy and the ability to sustain a high standard of service delivery. The improvement in market share increased income (BC 5) and therefore overall cost efficiency.

The difficulties of recruiting and retaining staff continued throughout 2002/03 and are currently showing no indications of improving within the London region. The introduction of a market supplement at the end of March 2003 of £2,000, as a

recruitment and retention initiative has failed to attract the required professionally qualified applicants to date and is currently being reviewed. Other features such as working conditions when compared with neighbouring local authorities may also be a contributory factor in recruitment and retention problems.

**7. Finance Observations**

7.1 Contained within the report.

**8. Legal Observations**

8.1 Contained within the report.

**9. Conclusion**

9.1 Members are invited to note the performance of the Planning and Building Control services during 2002/03 and the implications of increasing workloads in all areas and the impact on Government and Council targets.

**10. Background Papers**

10.1 None

**11. Author**

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