

METROPOLITAN BOROUGH OF WIRRAL

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORTATION AND PLANNING STRATEGY SELECT COMMITTEE – 27 NOVEMBER 2002

REPORT OF THE DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE/DIRECTOR OF PLANNING & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

DEVELOPMENT CONTROL BEST VALUE SERVICE IMPROVEMENT PLAN

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report outlines the actions proposed in delivering the Best Value Service Improvement Plan for the Development Control Service. It seeks Members' approval to endorse both the plan and also the monitoring procedures to ensure its delivery.
- 1.2 The report identifies the need for additional staffing resources, and requests funding for these from the Government's new Planning Improvement Grant.
- 1.3 The report also suggests that planning fee income surpluses be used to provide funding for temporary staff resources to cope with workload peaks.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.2 In the initial scoping report the key issues affecting the service and the anticipated outcomes were identified.
- 2.3 Following the review and agreement of options for service delivery the key issues facing the service and the anticipated outcomes identified in the initial scoping report remained unchanged as follows:

Key Issues

- Quality of customer service
- Performance in key service areas
- Ability to cope with change
- Transparency

Anticipated Outcomes

- A service that is more responsive to customer needs and expectations.
- Continuation and improvement of performance in determining planning applications, and improvements in other service areas, particularly those involving letter responses.

- To provide a service that is more responsive to change, both from within and outside the Council.
- A transparent service that conforms to the Government's expectations with regard to probity.

3. THE SERVICE IMPROVEMENT PLAN

3.1 Based on the service delivery options agreed by Cabinet on 13 December 2001, a Service Improvement Plan has been produced as detailed in Appendix 1.

3.2 The plan covers a five year period and will be subject to regular reviews. Once approved the improvements will be incorporated into the Departmental Plans and the Council's Best Value Performance Plan and will be monitored by both the Department and Members.

4. ISSUES ARISING FROM THE SERVICE IMPROVEMENT PLAN

4.1 Members will recall that a presentation was made to the 22 March 2002 meeting of the Environment and Planning Strategy Select Committee which specifically covered the problems being encountered in terms of rising planning application numbers, growing customer expectations, a fixed staffing resource, and the mechanism of income targets which does not allow the Department to use any excess income resulting from increased application numbers or increases in fees. It was explained that the consequence of these factors is a service that finds it increasingly difficult to maintain previous performance levels (particularly during peak workload/leave times), and one where a growing number of customers are expressing dissatisfaction with the quality of service provided.

4.2 Members agreed that it would be appropriate for further work to be carried out in terms of how funding could be identified to implement the improvements referred to in the Best Value Review. The Service Improvement Plan now provides the details of these improvements, and the funding issues are covered in the following section of this report.

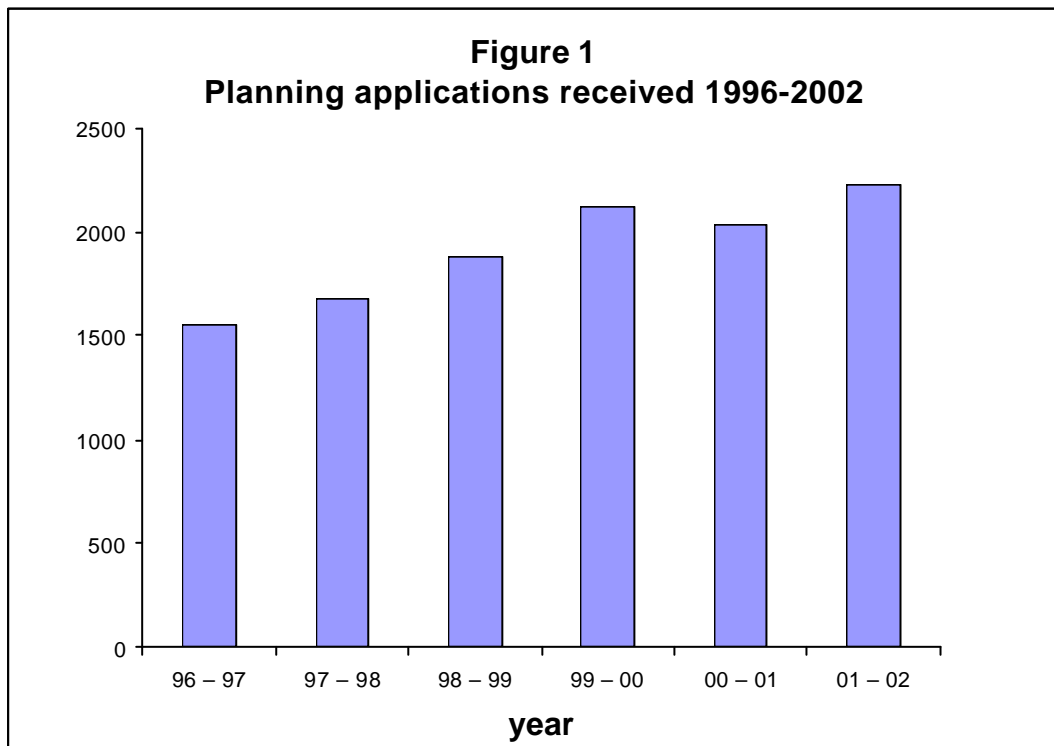
4.3 The measures incorporated in the Service Improvement Plan will enable the Development Control service to continue to meet its performance indicator targets. It should also result in the service reaching the top quartile for customer satisfaction.

5. FINANCIAL AND STAFFING IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The Service Improvement Plan provides a number of improvements which are aimed at resolving existing problems, improving the service to meet current and future customer demands, becoming a top quartile

service for customer satisfaction, as well as maintaining performance within the top quartile.

- 5.2 Given the existing level of staffing resource within the Team, the Service Improvement Plan could not be implemented, without diverting resources away from the processing of day to day work. This would have a direct impact on current performance levels.
- 5.3 The proposals within the Service Improvement Plan equate to a need for an additional 2.5 Planning staff, and half an administrative post. This requirement arises from the details of the estimated staff time to implement the improvements, as detailed in Appendix 1. The cost of this is likely to be in the order of £70,000 over the financial year 2003/4, and continuing on an annual basis. Whilst this would assist with implementing the stated improvements, an additional resource is sought to cope with the growing planning application and enforcement workload, which has continued year on year (received planning application numbers are shown in Figure 1 below), whilst maintaining previous performance levels. This would be in the form of either recruited or outsourced staffing, and would result in a requirement for £30k in 2003/4, and continuing on an annual basis.



Increased Government Funding

- 5.4 The Government has recently announced a new source of funding for Planning called the “Planning Investment Grant”. This follows on from the recent Green Paper on Planning, and is expected to be in the order of £50m spread nationally from 2003-04, rising to £170m in 2005-06. It

is intended to help Councils to better handle the pressures in workload currently being experienced, and to provide the improvements in Planning services which are specified in the Green Paper. An initial estimate suggests that the Authority might receive an additional £300k in 2003/04, as a result of this Grant.

- 5.5 The Government states that the funding will be provided within the Councils' annual settlement, and will not be ring fenced for Planning. This means that it may not be possible to identify what part of the increased settlement should be diverted towards the Planning Service.
- 5.6 The Government, having made resources available, will have an expectation that Planning services will be improved. It is important therefore that when this money is made available, it is targeted in a way that facilitates the implementation of the Development Control Service Improvement Plan. To this end, Members are requested to endorse the creation of the additional posts referred to above, so as to enable the implementation of the Service Improvement Plan, and provide additional assistance in handling growing workload levels. The details of these posts will need to be agreed by the Employment and Appointments Committee.
- 5.7 The Planning Green Paper also makes recommendations with regard to other areas of Planning, which will have an impact upon other parts of the Planning Division, most notably the Planning Policy Team which will be required to prepare the Local Development Framework and associated review of existing Development Plan policies by 2006. It is anticipated that this new responsibility will require the appointment of two additional planning staff, and associated budget, including provision for specialist advice.

Budget prediction for Planning Fees

- 5.8 Planning fee levels are set nationally by Central Government, and vary depending on the nature and size of planning applications submitted. Each year, the Local Authority has applied targets for the Department to achieve. Over the last 10 years, the Department has consistently met income targets. This led in 2000/2001 to a decision being taken to introduce a more ambitious income target. Unfortunately, in the financial year the target was applied, fee income did not meet the expected levels, due to a downturn in the numbers of large fee generating schemes being submitted, whilst there was a continued growth of applications with smaller fees. This led to a situation where our forecast income figures fell significantly. In response, compensatory savings were made across the Department to cover the shortfall in income. The workload however grew during this period (and continues to grow), while staffing levels have remained constant.
- 5.9 The 2002/03 budget was set to take account of these more realistic income targets. Experience to date (though we are only half way

through the financial year), indicates that the Department is on course to achieve this revised income target.

- 5.10 If the 2002/03 target is significantly exceeded this will only be because the number of applications has increased. Whilst this would benefit the Local Authority financially it is likely to impact on the Department's performance targets as an increase in volume of applications are being dealt with by the same number of officers. At times when application numbers increase, the only way of maintaining performance is to increase the staffing resource or to outsource work.
- 5.11 This requires additional financial resources. At present, in a situation where the Department is likely to exceed its income target and the workload is increased, there is no mechanism available to the Department to use the additional resources over and above agreed income targets on additional staff on a temporary basis. It would be an extremely effective tool if the Department were able to apply income surpluses to fund these staffing resources to handle these fluctuations.
- 5.12 Members are therefore requested to endorse a recommendation to Cabinet, that when any future income surpluses from planning fees occur, these surpluses can be used to hire additional temporary planning staff, or to outsource work, on an as required basis. This arrangement would be subject to the Council's existing rules regarding the management of expenditure.

Impact on ICT (Information & Communication Technology) Resources

- 5.13 A number of the improvements proposed will require sustained assistance from ICT staff. Before this additional improvement can take place to the existing Development Control computer system a number of planned and fundamental changes are required. These include upgrading the local server capacity, introduction of MS Windows 2000, rebuilding the current system using client server technology and further enhancements to GIS functionality. This work represents a considerable commitment from existing departmental ICT resources.
- 5.14 The Development Control computer system has been developed in-house. Further improvements to those listed above will have a significant impact on available resources including the priority given to other ICT development and support work across the Division. This may result in the need for procurement of additional resources either from WITS or externally. Clearly further detailed investigation will be required and this may have further financial implications. These implications will be reported back to Committee when they are quantified. The improvements will move the Development Control service forward in line with the Council's E-Government provision, and as a result, make the service more accessible and useable by a wider range of customers.

6. EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The implementation of the Service Improvement Plan should have positive equal opportunities implications.

7. HUMAN RIGHTS IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There are no human rights implications arising from this report.

8. LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 There are no Local Agenda 21 implications arising from this report.

9. PLANNING IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The Service Improvement Plan will form the basis for the future management of the Development Control service for the next 5 years.

10. COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 There are no community safety implications arising from this report.

11. LOCAL MEMBER SUPPORT IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 The report is of interest to Members for all areas of the Borough. |

12. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 12.1 Performance Management and Service Review Policy and Guidance
- 12.2 Best value – service review of development control findings and analysis of options for service delivery – Report to Cabinet 13 December 2001.
- 12.3 Best value – service review of development control findings and analysis of options for service delivery – Report to Environment & Planning Strategy Select Committee – 26 November 2001

13. RECOMMENDATION

That the Select Committee recommends to Cabinet the following:

1. That the Service Improvement Plan be approved.
2. That consideration of the use of part of the Planning Improvement Grant to enable the implementation of the Service Improvement Plan, and consideration of the use of any future planning fee income surpluses for temporary staffing resources be referred to the January

meeting of this Select Committee as part of the budget consideration process.

3. That following this consideration of the use of the Planning Improvement Grant and surplus income that the Employment and Appointments Committee consider the proposals relating to the creation of new posts/outsourcing

J. WILKIE

DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE/DIRECTOR OF PLANNING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

**APPENDIX 1
DEVELOPMENT CONTROL – SERVICE IMPROVEMENT PLAN**

Issues	Action Proposed	Resource Implications	Responsible Person	Completion Date	Purpose Of Action	Effects Of The Action
<i>Quality Of Customer Service</i>						
Need to improve Customer information (11.4) (ref. to Improvement Plan)	Provide information on progress of planning applications on web site.	Will require development of DCMIS system, which may take up to 25 FTE days DC time & 5 days Information Section time (CM/BK)	Colin Walker/Debbie Pickard (In conjunction with Information Section).	November 2003	To provide improved & more responsive customer service.	Fewer telephone enquiries to DC staff – more effective use of time. Improved customer satisfaction. BVPI 111
Need to improve Customer information (11.4)	All third party respondents' addresses to be entered into records on DCMIS.	Will require development of DCMIS system, which may take up to 15 FTE days DC time (drawing up & agreeing specification) & 15 days Information Section time.	Colin Walker (In conjunction with Information Section).	November 2003 Specification to be agreed by march 2003	To provide improved & more responsive customer service.	Will facilitate sending of acknowledgements as set out below.

Need to improve Customer information (11.4)	All third party respondents' addresses to be entered into records on DCMIS. (continued)	Manual inputting information on a daily basis – will require 50% FTE scale 1 admin clerk.	Toni Roberts Chris Wilson Stuart Thompson & new 50% admin clerk	Operational by November 2003		
Need to improve Customer information (11.4)	All third party respondents to planning applications to be sent acknowledgement, via letter or email, together with notification of decision.	Requires development of DCMIS system - up to 15 FTE days from DC and Information section	Colin Walker/Debbie Pickard (In conjunction with Information Section).	November 2003	To provide improved & more responsive customer service.	Fewer telephone enquiries to DC staff – more effective use of time. Improved customer satisfaction
Need to improve Customer information (11.4)	Review information sent out with application forms, neighbour letters and on web site, to reflect new access to agendas via web.	30 FTE days	Cheryl Berry/Angela Forsyth	December 2003 Progress to be reviewed at March and September 2003.	To provide improved & more responsive customer service.	Increased customer satisfaction. BVPI 111
Provide improvements to information in Reception (11.9)	Information provided to be upgraded, in form of UDP, leaflets, and information on who to contact	15 FTE days	Sheila Day	Reception improvements by May 2003 Leaflet improvements by June 2003	Improved service and information to customers	Increased customer satisfaction. BVPI 111

Issues	Action Proposed	Resource Implications	Responsible Person	Completion Date	Purpose Of Action	Effects Of The Action
Quality Of Customer Service						
Customer information (11.9)	Review DC information provided on web site	30 FTE days	Debbie Pickard	Start Feb 2003 end August 2003	Improved service and information to customers	Increased customer satisfaction. BVPI 111
Quality of Customer service (11.9)	Improve customer contact skills for all staff – specific training in customer care to be provided under IIP	60 FTE days	Colin Walker/Debbie Pickard to lead – all staff to be involved	Commence December 2002 Ongoing throughout period, with annual review each December	Improved service and information to customers	Increased customer satisfaction. BVPI 111
DC enquiries not currently being handled by One Stop Shops (11.16)	Provide for DC enquiries to be dealt with via One Stop Shops. Link information to Building Control to provide joined up advice.	10 FTE days DC time 10 FTE days BC time. Up to 30 FTE days Information Section time (due to area network consequences)	Alan Ford/Martin Earlam/Bryce Taylor In conjunction with information Section and Building Control	June 2003	Improved service to all customers. Will provide conformity with BVPI 112	BVPI 111 BVPI 112

Issues	Action Proposed	Resource Implications	Responsible Person	Completion Date	Purpose Of Action	Effects Of The Action
<i>Performance in Key Service Areas & Ability to Cope with Change</i>						
Single Development Control Team (11.12)	Single Development Control Team	20 FTE days DC time Up to 5 days Information Section time (due to changes to DCMIS coding)	Colin Walker/Debbie Pickard/Alan Ford/Martin Earlam/Bryce Taylor	April 2003	Improved performance, service and information to customers	BVPI 109, BVPI 110, BVPI 111, BVPI 112 and local indicators
Letter response times Councillors & MPs (11.10)	Letter response times to be complied with – aided by IT monitoring system (existing system to be more widely implemented and accessible by all DC officers)	5 FTE days per month DC time 5 days Information Section time to implement system	All DC/Enforcement case officers	From January 2003	Improved service and information to customers	Increased customer satisfaction. BVPI 111

Issues	Action Proposed	Resource Implications	Responsible Person	Completion Date	Purpose Of Action	Effects Of The Action
<i>Performance in Key Service Areas & Ability to Cope with Change</i>						
Enforcement Policy & Guide (11.13)	Enforcement Policy & Guide	15 FTE days	Martin Earlam	August 2003, with progress review February 2003.	Improved service and information to customers	Fewer formal complaints received .
Volume of telephone calls and response times (11.11)	Implement telephone management system	10 FTE days 2 FTE days from WITS	Alan Ford	March 2003	Improved service and information to customers	Local indicator on telephone response times
Role of Tree Officer (11.13)	Widen role to enable greater range of functions & duties.	5 FTE days	Martin Earlam/Gavin Weir	May 2004	Greater flexibility to enable post to deal with wider range of tasks, thus providing more flexible resourcing.	Improvements in performance. BVPI 109, BVPI 110, BVPI 111, BVPI 112 and local indicators

Issues	Action Proposed	Resource Implications	Responsible Person	Completion Date	Purpose Of Action	Effects Of The Action
<i>Performance in Key Service Areas & Ability to Cope with Change</i>						
Tree service Planning Officers to handle applications for tree works (11.13)	Develop DCMIS to enable tree works applications to be handled in the same way as planning applications (11.13) This will require a new module to be developed using GIS as a platform.	20 FTE days DC time. Up to 30 days Information Section time	Martin Earlam/Gavin Weir/Chris Malpas	Specification to be drawn up by September 2003 System implemented by May 2004	Improved service and information to customers	Improvements in performance. BVPI 109, BVPI 110, BVPI 111, BVPI 112 and local indicators New local indicator to cover tree applications.

Issues	Action Proposed	Resource Implications	Responsible Person	Completion Date	Purpose Of Action	Effects Of The Action
<i>Performance in Key Service Areas & Ability to Cope with Change</i>						
TPO making and response times (11.13)	Develop partnership working with local groups in making TPOs	5 FTE days	Martin Earlam/Gavin Weir	September 2003	Improved service and information to customers	Improvements in general customer satisfaction.
TPO making and response times (11.13)	Streamline template for making new TPOs	5 FTE days	Gavin Weir	September 2003	Improved service and information to customers	Improvements in general customer satisfaction.

Issues	Action Proposed	Resource Implications	Responsible Person	Completion Date	Purpose Of Action	Effects Of The Action
<i>Performance in Key Service Areas & Ability to Cope with Change</i>						
Effectiveness & efficiency of having dual administration processes for Development Control & Building Control (11.14)	Feasibility study on implications of merging Development Control and Building Control administrative support functions. Will need to take account of ICT support implications and may require additional support from Information Section	25 FTE days If implemented, may require substantial additional support from Information Section	Colin Walker/Paul Grey	December 2003	Possible improvements in efficiency and effectiveness	Potential for reduction in cost by more efficient use of resources. Possible improvement in cost of Planning Service per head of population (BVPI 107)
Disparate elements of development process. (11.15)	Establishment of Development Team working – under formalised structure with named participants & service standards	5 FTE days	Alan Ford	December 2003	Improved service to applicants/developers	Improvements to service to applicants BVPI 111

Issues	Action Proposed	Resource Implications	Responsible Person	Completion Date	Purpose Of Action	Effects Of The Action
<i>Transparency</i>						
Clarity of decision making (11.5)	Review format of planning application files and marking of approved plans.	2 FTE days	Cheryl Berry/Angela Forsyth	July 2003	To provide improved customer service and clarity of decision.	Increased customer satisfaction. BVPI 111
Provide performance information to Councillors (11.7)	Provide quarterly monitoring reports on planning applications received and determined, and enforcement cases outstanding, to appropriate Select Committee	5 FTE days per quarter	Debbie Pickard Martin Earlam	From January 2003	Improved information to Councillors on service performance	Increased customer satisfaction. BVPI 111
Provide performance information to staff (11.8)	Provide monthly team and individual performance information to DC staff	1 FTE day per month	Debbie Pickard	From April 2003	Incentive to maintain & improve performance	Increased customer satisfaction. BVPI 111

Issues	Action Proposed	Resource Implications	Responsible Person	Completion Date	Purpose Of Action	Effects Of The Action
<i>Transparency</i>						
Desire for Councillors to be aware of pre-application discussions with developers (11.18)	Alert Planning Committee at report stage, if pre-application discussions have taken place. Possible amendments to DCMIS system required	5 days DC time 1 day Information Section time	All DC case officers Chris Malpas	November 2002	To provide more comprehensive information to Councillors, and to increase transparency.	None measurable.

Issues	Action Proposed	Resource Implications	Responsible Person	Completion Date	Purpose Of Action	Effects Of The Action
<i>Ability to Cope with Change & Transparency</i>						
Need to have more formalised and risk free approach to monitoring Section 106 agreements (11.17)	<p>Introduce Section 106 monitoring and management system</p> <p>Will require system specification with new module to be added to existing system, or stand alone system to be bought in.</p>	<p>15 FTE days to produce specification.</p> <p>Up to 20 FTE days from Information section to produce system, or if bought in, financial costs to be further specified.</p>	Colin Walker/Debbie Pickard/ Chris Malpas	<p>Specification by December 2003 Implementation by May 2004</p> <p>Review each year throughout period.</p> <p>Report status of ongoing S106s each year to appropriate Committee.</p>	<p>Improved service to customers. Reduced risk of S106s not being implemented. Improvements in terms of probity.</p>	<p>Increased transparency and probity.</p> <p>Removal of identified risk area by District Audit Office.</p>

Issues	Action Proposed	Resource Implications	Responsible Person	Completion Date	Purpose Of Action	Effects Of The Action
<i>Quality Of Customer Service & Transparency</i>						
Desire for Councillors to be aware of pre-application discussions with developers (11.18)	<p>Councillors to be advised on request if pre-application discussions are taking place.</p> <p>Guidance note for staff to be prepared.</p> <p>Guidance note for Councillors to be prepared</p>	<p>To be determined</p> <p>5 FTE days</p> <p>5 FTE days</p>	<p>All DC case officers</p> <p>Bryce Taylor</p> <p>Bryce Taylor</p>	<p>Commence from January 2003</p> <p>March 2003</p> <p>March 2003</p>	To provide more comprehensive information to Councillors, and to increase transparency.	None measurable.
Quality of information provided to Councillors and members of public at Planning Committee (11.19)	Improve quality of Officer presentations at Planning Committee, by staff training & improved use of IT including digital photography.	<p>10 FTE days</p> <p>May have implications for ICT in terms of server storage. Further investigations required.</p>	Alan Ford/Bryce Taylor/Chris Malpas	<p>July 2003</p> <p>With a review at march 2004</p>	Improved service to Planning Committee and more informed decision making.	Can be measured by surveys of people attending Planing Committee (as previously carried out)

Issues	Action Proposed	Resource Implications	Responsible Person	Completion Date	Purpose Of Action	Effects Of The Action
<i>Quality Of Customer Service & Transparency</i>						
Information for the public at Planning Committee (11.19)	Provide guidance notes for public attending Planning Committee	5 FTE days	Debbie Pickard/Daniel Owen	June 2003	Improved participation and customer service at Planning Committee	Can be measured by surveys of people attending Planning Committee (as previously carried out)
Public access to planning application files (11.20)	Review format of planning application files to facilitate public access	5 FTE days	Daniel Owen	June 2003	More open style of working and improved customer satisfaction	BVPI 111
Capability of staff in providing high quality public service (11.21)	Staff training to be formalised and more rigorously provided to meet identified needs under IIP	30 FTE days each year.	All DC staff	Continuous throughout period.	Improved customer service.	BVPI 111 IP standard to be achieved

Issues	Action Proposed	Resource Implications	Responsible Person	Completion Date	Purpose Of Action	Effects Of The Action
<i>Quality Of Customer Service & Transparency</i>						
Need to raise awareness of planning process in local communities (11.23)	Develop links with Area Forums (11.23)	20 FTE days per year	Colin Walker to lead All DC staff to attend at least one Area Forum or roadshow per year.	Ongoing	Improvements in local awareness of planning system.	BVPI 111
Need to ensure Councillors have appropriate skill base to enable decision making on Planning applications (11.22)	Councillor training, with each Councillor having a personal skills record	5 FTE days per year (not including Councillor time)	Debbie Pickard	Implemented by July 2003, then continuous throughout period.	Improvements in decision making process.	Not measurable Ensures conformity to DTLR guidance

Issues	Action Proposed	Resource Implications	Responsible Person	Completion Date	Purpose Of Action	Effects Of The Action
<i>Performance in Key Service Areas & Ability to Cope with Change</i>						
Peaks in workload (10.6)	Future business forecasting & trend analysis	10 FTE days per year	Colin Walker	Ongoing	Enables more effective business planning and resourcing of service in time to handle peaks in workload	BVPI 109 BVPI 110
Ability of existing service to cope with peaks in workload (12.10)	Partial externalisation of planning application & appeal processing	10 FTE days during 2003	Colin Walker	By December 2003	Improved customer service and performance	BVPI 108 BVPI 109 BVPI 110
Ability of existing enforcement service to cope with peaks in workload (12.10)	Partial externalisation of enforcement service	10FTE days during 2003	Colin Walker	By December 2003	Improved customer service and performance	BVPI 108 BVPI 109 BVPI 110