

**STRATEGIC PLANNING,  
SUSTAINABILITY &  
TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE**

**7 NOVEMBER 2017**

**PLANNING REVIEW UPDATE REPORT**

<b>Final Decision-Maker</b>	Strategic Planning, Sustainability & Transportation Committee
<b>Lead Head of Service</b>	Director of Regeneration & Place
<b>Lead Officer and Report Author</b>	Director of Regeneration & Place
<b>Classification</b>	Public
<b>Wards affected</b>	All

**This report makes the following recommendations to this Committee:**

1. The contents of the Planning Review Update Report be noted.

**This report relates to the following corporate priorities:**

- Keeping Maidstone Borough an attractive place for all -
- Securing a successful economy for Maidstone Borough -

**Timetable**

<b>Meeting</b>	<b>Date</b>
Committee – Strategic Planning, Sustainability & Transportation	7 November 2017

# PLANNING REVIEW UPDATE REPORT

## 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report provides the Strategic Planning, Sustainability and Transportation Committee (SPS&T Committee) with the findings of the IESE review (as set out in the Exempt Appendix to this report) that commenced in February 2017 and concluded in June 2017. This report also sets out the high level recommendations for improvement, as suggested by IESE, and also the progress that has been made to date with the implementation of these.
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## 2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 2.1 In the summer of 2016, the CEO and Leader of the Council requested that this review be undertaken, and so a project team was created to prepare a brief to include the various lines of enquiry. This brief was approved by this Committee on 8th November 2016 (the report to SPS&T is provided as Annex 1), and at the same time gave authorisation for the review to be commissioned and undertaken.
- 2.2 A mini-tender was duly undertaken and the successful bidder was IESE, for a fee of £37,000 plus VAT and expenses, which was to be drawn from the Council's transition fund monies, which is set aside for projects such as this. The review was undertaken by IESE staff based at Maidstone House between February and April 2017. To form their opinions and recommendations, IESE undertook the following;
- Shadowing of some planning staff
  - Interviews with all planning staff
  - Interviews with local authority stakeholders (KCC and Swale)
  - Interviews with developers / service users
  - Member workshop
  - Parish Councillor interviews
- 2.3 IESE presented their initial findings to the Corporate Leadership team on 9th May 2017. Following this briefing sessions were held with the Chairs of SPS&T and Planning Committees on 19th June 2017 and then with the Vice Chairs of these Committees on 22nd June 2017. IESE issued their draft report on 25th June 2017, which contained findings and recommendations, and this was shared with all the staff by way of a presentation by the report author on 5th July 2017.
- 2.4 In simple terms the findings suggested improvements could be made to two key areas;
- Staffing structures.
  - System and processes.

2.5 In terms of improving the staffing structures, the preference from the department managers was that the staff should be presented with different options that they could explore within a workshop setting led by the managers with support from the Human Resources team, and ultimately then make a collective preferred choice for the managers to consider, refine and then implement. The workshop took place in July, with a new team structure within Development Management selected to best address the shortfalls identified by IESE, and this was followed by a short period of informal staff consultation whereby staff were invited to state their preferred team within which they would like to work, and any specific roles appropriate to their existing grade and title for which they would like to be considered. This process was completed during the first week of September and was fully implemented in week commencing 16th October 2017.

2.6 The summary findings report produced by IESE is included as an annex 2 to this report (within the yellow pages). Within the recommendations it set out three different scenarios;

- Option 1 – Status Quo.
- Option 2 – Improve.
- Option 3 – Transform.

2.7 The Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) preferred the Improve option, and so the ideas around how to improve have been jointly developed by IESE, the CLT, the department managers and the planning staff. Option 1 would obviously not have addressed the weaknesses identified whilst option 3 was considered to be overly disruptive at Head of Department level, effectively suggesting that three of our Head roles (Planning & Development, Housing & Communities and Regeneration & Economic Development) be consolidated into one. The CLT felt that such a loss of capacity at Head level would be an unacceptable risk, especially given the breadth of work that the three Heads all undertake.

2.8 Therefore, in terms of the recommendations from IESE, these are all set out within the summary report, and these will be followed up and implemented as appropriate. However, the whole process has been invaluable inasmuch that it has opened up a huge amount of dialogue between myself, the Head of Planning, Managers and the staff, as to how to shape and deliver the service and department, so as to maximise the resources that are at our disposal and service delivery that is technically sound, efficient and customer focussed. Therefore, the direction of travel can be summarised as follows;

<b>Strategic Planning</b>	<p>This was demonstrated as being a very strong team, buoyed by the successful progression of a number of key strategic projects including the Local Plan. Accordingly, the plan is to build upon these strengths and successes and to create a progressive agenda around the following;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The commissioning of design briefs and / or masterplans for allocated sites as well as other opportunity areas that could come forward as</li> </ul>
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	<p>part of the Local Plan review or the next plan period.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As part of the above, scope the merits and feasibility of a garden village settlement for the next Local Plan, post 2031, so that it can be evaluated against other possible delivery strategies.</li> <li>• To lead the introduction of the Community Infrastructure Levy with a focus upon strengthening relationships with a number of key partners, to include KCC, so as to maximise the delivery of new infrastructure for the borough.</li> <li>• Ongoing policy development.</li> <li>• Continuing to facilitate the creation and adoption of further Neighbourhood Plans.</li> <li>• Subsuming the Business Management unit, that until now has been a cross department support function comprising three staff. The Business Manager role will be retitled to "Planning Projects and Delivery Manager" and this resource will now be focussed upon delivering first class project management to support a number of place shaping projects, effectively bringing more front line expertise and resource to this part of the service. Accordingly most of the back office elements of the role will now transfer to Mid Kent Planning Support with the rest distributed amongst the remaining department Head and Managers. The Planning Technical officers will continue to be cross departmental, providing technical administrative support to all four teams.</li> </ul>
<p><b><u>Major Developments</u></b></p>	<p>Until now, Maidstone has just had a single Major Projects Officer, and so realistically this individual has not been able to take a lead on all the larger planning applications in the borough. Furthermore, the feedback from developers and housebuilders signalled a need for more resource and consistency in this area, so that applications can be processed faster, perhaps through Planning Performance Agreements (PPAs). Accordingly the Officer role has been retitled to that of Major Developments Manager, and will be supported by two Principal Planning Officers (from existing resource). The new team will be charged with working proactively and positively with developers and housebuilders, and will work exclusively on the following;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All major applications of &gt;40 residential units.</li> <li>• All major commercial property applications.</li> <li>• All associated pre-application work but with a focus upon developing the PPA offer.</li> <li>• All associated appeals.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brownfield sites of 10+ residential units.</li> <li>• Line managing the Heritage, Landscaping &amp; Design service.</li> <li>• Supporting cross cutting corporate projects.</li> </ul>
<p><b><u>Development Management</u></b></p>	<p>Without doubt, Maidstone has incredible expertise in this area, not more so than at Manager level. However, the breadth of work across the area coupled with the volume of applications has meant that this area has become most stretched, with the manager having excessive line management responsibilities relative to the other managers in the planning service. Accordingly some of the work and staffing resource will transfer to the Major Developments team, and the Development Management will have a narrower brief, as follows;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All major applications of &lt;40 residential units.</li> <li>• All minor applications.</li> <li>• All miscellaneous applications (excluding trees)</li> <li>• All "Others" / Householder applications.</li> <li>• All associated appeals.</li> <li>• All planning enforcement work except that being handled through the Community Protection team.</li> </ul> <p>Within Development Management there will be three teams as follows;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Majors (&lt;40) and Minors team, led by Principal Planning Officer.</li> <li>• "Others" / Householder team, led by a Senior Planning Officer.</li> <li>• Enforcement, led by Senior Planning Officers.</li> </ul>
<p><b><u>Summary</u></b></p>	<p>Based on the evidence from IESE, particularly in terms of feedback from the developers and housebuilders, there is a need to separate the high value / low volume work from that of the low value / high volume work, giving more experienced and expert staffing resource to the former to effectively focus upon the delivery of the emerging Local Plan.</p> <p>The allocation of work between the Major Development and Development Management teams may of course need to flex from time to time, and it is probable that the Development Manager may retain a very small portfolio of larger applications reflecting his role in the Development Management process.</p> <p>The analysis from IESE identified dissatisfaction from both service users and planning staff about the use of extensions of time when processing planning</p>

applications. This reliance has in part arisen as more applications are being received than determined on a month to month basis, and on balance the introduction of more clearly defined specialist teams is seen as part of the solution to address this situation.

IESE were asked specifically to explore whether the staffing resource within the planning department was adequate for the work. They were clear that it was, but productivity was lower than it could be because of weak systems and processes in the main areas of Development Management, resulting in higher than necessary levels of failure demand, and associated levels of dissatisfaction from customers and staff alike. This fact came through strongly from staff feedback along with a clear appetite for change in terms of improved systems, procedures and staffing structures.

To help design and embed these improvements, a specialist change management consultant has been hired to support the Development Manager for a three month period, commencing at the beginning of October 17, and the report author will work closely with them too. The specific processes to be refined are all set out within the IESE report.

Furthermore, referring back to the past imbalance between applications received and determined, the CLT has authorised additional staffing funding to Development Management through to 31<sup>st</sup> March 18 to extend contracts, and review again at this point to be paid for from surpluses accrued from the planning service in years previous.

The resultant structure does not and is not intended to generate staff savings in the short term but rather make the best use of the staffing resource available so as to improve the quality of the services offered and to relieve the pressure on staff. However, it is possible that the changes could yield staffing savings in the long term, by improving the productivity of the planning officers, and also, the overall demands on the service may well start to reduce once the Local Plan is adopted.

It is also designed in such a way that the Head of Planning and Development will have more capacity to help shape and launch the new Major Developments team, and so that his role can be more outward facing, to developers and housebuilders, who we now know really expect and

	value this input at the front end of the process.
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2.9 To conclude, this has been a thorough and interesting process. The input from IESE has been invaluable, but the direction of travel set out has very much been developed collaboratively over the past three months, and has also been informed by discussions with peer organisations, stakeholders and Members too.

2.10 Realistically, given the finite resources at our disposal, there is a need to create more of commercially minded, creative, and possibly a more pragmatic approach to how we work, and as such there cannot be a fixed start and end to this project. However, the work undertaken by IESE showed clearly how our service is viewed by those who use it and by the staff that deliver it, and it is very much the intention to revisit these two simple perceptions in 12 months, to ensure that a positive journey of continuous improvement is underway. In the meantime, it should also be noted that all the staff have worked extremely hard to maintain performance throughout the review period, and have all contributed positively to the process.

2.11 Furthermore, positive progress has already been on a number of fronts, as follows;

- The speed at which S106 agreements are being processed has increased markedly, with what was once a considerable backlog of unsigned agreements now eradicated.
- The style and brevity of Planning Committee reports have been improved.
- A modest but consistent reduction in overdue applications.
- There have already been improvements in how MBC and KCC officers are collaborating on Highways and other infrastructure issues and this progress was cemented at an externally facilitated workshop held on 26th September 2017.
- A closer working relationship between Planning and Economic Development has been created, with both departments now co-located on the 5th floor at Maidstone House.
- A new Community Protection Team has been created within the Housing & Communities Department led by John Littlemore. This new team is drawn from existing resources within that department, as well as Planning and Environment & Street Scene. This new team was launched in July 2017 and is bolstering our approach to MATRIX type casework.
- The Strategic Planning Team led by Mark Egerton is already building their ambitious programme of place shaping projects, to include such initiatives as the Tri-Study (Parking, Bus Station and Park & Ride) and the Town Centre Study (looking for opportunity areas for housing and mixed use regeneration and growth).
- The Head of Planning & Development has already commenced a programme of engagement, to include a series of breakfast meetings with senior figures from the housebuilding and development sectors, exploring ideas as to how to improve the planning application process for larger developments.

- The notion of the more widespread use of Planning Performance Agreements is being developed, with a successful Member workshop on the topic having taken place in the summer.
- The exploration of putting in place a OJEU compliant framework of planning consultants that can be called upon to process applications on our behalf, during periods of high demand on the service.

### **3. AVAILABLE OPTIONS**

3.1 This report is for information only.

### **4. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

4.1 Not applicable.

### **5. CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK**

5.1 None.

### **6. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION**

6.1 Following a mini tender exercise where proposals were invited from iESE, Solace and Samrai Management Ltd, the latter has been appointed to work with the report author and the Development Manager to implement the system and process improvements. Mandy Samrai commenced work with the team on 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2017 for a 3 month period to conclude this area of the iESE recommendations.

### **7. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS**

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Implications</b>	<b>Sign-off</b>
<b>Impact on Corporate Priorities</b>	The best possible Planning service will underpin all the Corporate objectives and of course the delivery of the emerging Local Plan.	Chief Executive. Alison Broom
<b>Risk Management</b>	N/A	
<b>Financial</b>	The service review has evidenced best practice in getting value for money and identified opportunities for efficiencies within the service. The actions outlined in the report will help to address the factors that have led to	Section 151 Officer Mark Green

	overspends on staffing in Development Management and will indicate areas for further efficiency improvement.	
<b>Staffing</b>	It is important that the review is welcomed by all the Planning staff, and that it is handled sensitively, so that staff morale is maintained and that they will ultimately own and implement the deliverables.	Head of Planning. Rob Jarman
<b>Legal</b>	It will be important to involve the Legal team who deal with planning matters in any review of processes, such as s106 agreements, managing appeals and inquiries etc.	Interim Head of Legal Partnership
<b>Equality Impact Needs Assessment</b>	N/A	
<b>Environmental/Sustainable Development</b>	The review will build mechanisms into the planning process to embed high quality design, both in visual terms as well as in terms of sustainability.	Head of Planning. Rob Jarman
<b>Community Safety</b>	N/A	
<b>Human Rights Act</b>	N/A	
<b>Procurement</b>	The external consultant will be procured in accordance with the Council's standing orders.	Section 151 Officer. Mark Green
<b>Asset Management</b>	N/A	

## 8. REPORT APPENDICES

The following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report:

- Appendix I: Report to SPS&T of 8 November 2016.
- Exempt Appendix: Maidstone Borough Council High Level Planning Review: Findings and Recommendations – Summary Document