

Bath & North East Somerset Council

MEETING:	Development Control Committee	
MEETING DATE:	11 th May 2011	AGENDA ITEM NUMBER
TITLE:	Quarterly Performance Report – Oct – Dec 2010	
WARD:	ALL	
AN OPEN PUBLIC ITEM		
List of attachments to this report:		
None		

1 THE ISSUE

- 1.1 At the request of Members and as part of our on-going commitment to making service improvements, this report provides Members with performance information across a range of activities within the Development Management function. This report covers the period from 1st Oct – 31st Dec 2010 as comparative data is not available until the end of the following quarter (31st March 2011).

2 RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 Members are asked to note the contents of the performance report.

3 THE REPORT

3.1 Commentary

Members' attention is drawn to the fact that as shown in **Table 1** below, performance on 'Major', 'Minor' and 'Other' were all below government targets during Oct - Dec 2010, this is the first time since 2007/08.

Performance on determining 'Major' applications within 13 weeks rose slightly to 50% during the Oct to Dec 2010, but still below target. Performance on determining 'Minor' applications within 8 weeks fell from 66% to 59%. Performance on 'Other' applications within the same target time of 8 weeks dropped from 82% to 70%, again below target.

Table 1 - Comparison of applications determined within target times

Government target for National Indicator 157	National Oct - Dec 2010	B&NES Apr - Jun 2010	B&NES Jul - Sep 2010	B&NES Oct - Dec 2010
'Major' applications 60%	66%	12/20 (60%)	9/21 (43%)	12/24 (50%)
'Minor' applications 65%	74%	115/176 (65%)	103/156 (66%)	86/145 (59%)
'Other' applications 80%	85%	294/379 (78%)	311/378 (82%)	263/378 (70%)

Note: An explanation of 'Major', 'Minor' and 'Other' categories are set out below.

'LARGE-SCALE MAJOR' DEVELOPMENTS – Decisions to be made within 13 weeks

- Residential – 200 or more dwellings or site area of 4Ha or more
- Other Land Uses – Floor space of more than 10,000 sq. metres or site area of more than 2Ha
- Changes of Use (including change of use or subdivision to form residential units) – criteria as above apply

'SMALL-SCALE MAJOR' DEVELOPMENTS – Decisions to be made within 13 weeks

- Residential – 10-199 dwellings or site area of 0.5Ha and less than 4Ha
- Other Land Uses – Floor space 1,000 sq. metres and 9,999 sq. metres or site area of 1Ha and less than 2Ha
- Changes of Use (including change of use or subdivision to form residential units) – criteria as above apply

'MINOR' DEVELOPMENTS – Decisions to be made within 8 weeks

- Residential – Up to 9 dwellings or site up to 0.5 Ha
- Other Land Uses – Floor space less than 1000 sq. metres or site less than 1 Ha

'OTHER' DEVELOPMENTS – Decisions to be made within 8 weeks

- Mineral handling applications (not County Matter applications)
- Changes of Use – All non-Major Changes of Use
- Householder Application (i.e. within the curtilage of an existing dwelling)
- Advertisement Consent
- Listed Building Consent
- Conservation Area Consent
- Certificate of Lawfulness
- Notifications

Table 2 - Applications determined in comparison with other Unitary Authorities

Neighbouring Unitary Authorities: Oct – Dec 2010	'Major' decisions within 13 weeks (%)	'Minor' decisions within 8 weeks (%)	'Other' decisions within 8 weeks (%)
Bath & North East Somerset	50%	59%	70%
Bristol City	72%	81%	90%
North Somerset	90%	73%	88%
South Gloucestershire	73%	79%	91%

The latest available data shown in **Table 2** above indicates that the Council's performance failed to meet all three categories of performance targets for the Oct – Dec 2010 period. It demonstrates also that all the surrounding unitary authorities are still determining applications above the national targets of 60%, 65% and 80% respectively.

There has been an increase in work received by the department since spring '10 and work loads have remained relatively high since. Officers have been dealing with this at the same time as concentrating effort in clearing backlog work following the departure of some members of staff in the summer. A backlog in registering applications has developed since Christmas, which has had a knock on affect in terms of the target dates for the determination of the applications by case officers, and whilst the situation is improving a mini review of the registration process is underway in order to improve efficiencies in the process. There will be renewed emphasis on performance management in the year ahead to bring the service back to consistently good performance levels achieved prior to these changes.

Table 3 - 'New Residential Dwellings' development application analysis

Neighbouring Unitary Authorities: Oct – Dec 2010	Total Number of Applications determined	Number of 'new residential dwellings' applications determined	Percentage
Bath & North East Somerset	547	57	10%
Bristol City	741	113	15%
North Somerset	491	38	8%
South Gloucestershire	523	52	10%

Table 3 above shows that of the 547 applications that were determined in Bath & North East Somerset, only 10% related to new residential development. This follows a similar pattern for North Somerset Council (8%) and South Gloucestershire Council at 10%. These are all significantly less however, when compared with 15% for Bristol City Council, which is a much larger authority and has a more concentrated urban character.

Table 4 - Recent planning application performance statistics

Application nos.	2009/10				2010/11			
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
On hand at start	487	492	554	438	576	544	562	
Received	530	620	525	590	601	629	499	
Withdrawn	36	59	42	44	59	56	36	
Determined	486	497	597	407	575	555	547	
On hand at end	495	556	440	577	542	562	478	
Delegated	467	484	571	389	557	528	520	
% Delegated	96.0	97.3	95.8	95.5	96.8	95.1	95.0	
Refused	99	72	106	62	99	81	99	
% Refused	20.3	14.4	17.7	15.2	17.2	14.5	18.0	

Table 4 above shows numbers and percentages of applications received, determined, together with details of delegated levels and refusal rates.

Due to seasonal variation, quarterly figures in this report are compared with the corresponding quarter in the previous year. During the last three months, the number of new applications received and made valid has fallen by 5% when compared with the corresponding quarter last year. This figure is also a 5% drop on the same period two years ago, and 24% down on three years ago. Overall however applications received have risen 4% in the first 3 quarters of 10/11 when compared to the same 3 quarters in the previous financial year.

The current delegation rate is 95% of all decisions being made at officer level against cases referred for committee decision. England average for the same quarter is 91%.

Table 5 - Planning Appeals summary

	Jan – Mar 2010	Apr – Jun 2010	Jul – Sep 2010	Oct – Dec 2010
Appeals lodged	17	19	20	19
Appeals decided	26	17	17	23
Appeals allowed	4 (19%)	3 (25%)	4 (33%)	4 (21%)
Appeals dismissed	17 (81%)	9 (75%)	8 (67%)	15 (79%)

The figures set out in **Table 5** above indicate the number of appeals lodged for the Oct to Dec 2010 quarter remains around the same number when compared with the previous two quarters.

Members will be aware that the England average for appeals won by appellants (and therefore allowed) is approximately 32%. Because of the relatively small numbers of appeals involved figures will fluctuate slightly each quarter, but the general trend over the last 12 months for Bath & North East Somerset Council is that of the total number of planning appeals decided approximately 23% are allowed against refusals of planning applications, which demonstrates good performance by the authority.

Table 6 - Enforcement Investigations summary

	Jan – Mar 2010	Apr – Jun 2010	Jul – Sep 2010	Oct – Dec 2010
Investigations launched	170	165	179	153
Investigations closed	238	206	226	213
Enforcement Notices issued	1	3	0	2
Planning Contravention Notices served	6	2	1	2
Breach of Condition Notices served	0	0	0	1

The figures shown in **Table 6** indicate that slightly fewer investigations were received this quarter, when compared with the previous quarterly figure. Resources continue to be focused on the enforcement of planning control with 5 legal notices having been served during this quarter.

Tables 7 and 8 - Transactions with Customers

The planning service regularly monitors the number and nature of transactions between the Council and its planning customers. This is extremely valuable in providing management information relating to the volume and extent of communications from customers.

It remains a huge challenge to ensure that officers are able to maintain the improvements to the speed and quality of determination of planning applications whilst responding to correspondence and increasing numbers of emails the service receives.

Table 7 - Letters and telephone calls

	Apr – Jun 2010	Jul – Sep 2010	Oct – Dec 2010
Telephone calls answered within 20 seconds	89%	89%	90%
Number of general planning enquiry letters received	302	284	197

Table 8 - Number of monitored emails

	Apr – Jun 2010	Jul – Sep 2010	Oct – Dec 2010
Number of emails to 'Development Control'	1756	1705	1573
Number of emails to 'Planning Support'	1223	1077	1281
Number of emails to Team Administration within Development Management	2511	2489	3010

The volume of incoming e-mail is now substantial, and is far exceeding the volume of incoming paper-based correspondence. These figures are exclusive of emails that individual planning officers receive, but all require action just in the same way as hard copy documentation. The overall figure for the Oct - Dec 2010 quarter shows a notable increase in volume of electronic communications when compared to the previous quarter, and a continuing decrease for traditional postal methods, highlighting the continuing shift in modes of communication with the service over the last few years.

Table 9 – Other areas of work

The service not only deals with formal planning applications and general enquiries, but also has formal procedures in place to deal with matters such as pre-application proposals, Householder Development Planning Questionnaires and procedures for discharging conditions on planning permissions. **Table 9** below shows the numbers of these types of procedures that require resource to action and determine.

During the last quarter, there has been a very slight decrease in the overall volume of these procedures received in the service. This is partly due to the seasonal variation.

Table 9

	Apr – Jun 2010	Jul – Sep 2010	Oct – Dec 2010
Number of Household Development Planning Questionnaires	138	132	121
Number of pre-application proposals submitted	178	133	149

Number of 'Discharge of Condition' requests	137	140	118
Number of pre-application proposals submitted through the 'Development Team' process	5	4	7
Applications for Non-material amendments	23	26	16

Table 10 – Works to Trees

Another function that the Planning Service undertakes involves dealing with applications and notifications for works relating to trees. **Table 10** below shows the number and percentage of these applications and notifications determined. The figures show fluctuations in the numbers of applications and notifications received. However, during Oct – Dec 2010, performance on determining applications for works to trees subject to Tree Preservation Orders and performance on dealing with notifications for works to trees within a Conservation Area remained above 95%.

Table 10	Apr – Jun 2010	Jul – Sep 2010	Oct – Dec 2010
Number of applications for works to trees subject to a Tree Preservation Order (TPO)	6	13	21
Percentage of applications for works to trees subject to a TPO determined within 8 weeks	83%	100%	95%
Number of notifications for works to trees within a Conservation Area (CA)	134	148	180
Percentage of notifications for works to trees within a Conservation Area (CA) determined within 6 weeks	98%	100%	98%

Table 11 - Customer transactions using Council Connect

As outlined in previous performance reports, Members will be aware that since 2006, 'Council Connect' has been taking development management related 'Frequently Asked Questions' (FAQs).

Table 11 below shows an extract of volumes of customer transactions for the previous three quarters:

	Apr – Jun 2010	Jul – Sep 2010	Oct – Dec 2010
Total customer transactions to Council Connect	1,653	442	927
Total customer transactions (and percentage) resolved at First Point of Contact	1338 (81%)	101 (23%)	609 (66%)
Number of Service Requests to Development Management	315	341	318

318 'Service Requests' were made by customer service staff to Planning Information Officers and these types of requests usually relate to more complex matters, which need research in order to provide the customer with complete information. The transactions shown in the table above show a sizable volume of requests to resolve complex planning issues and Council Connect taking development management related FAQs. Note the dramatic changes in the top figures for the last 3 quarters. This is because as of around the summertime period Council Connect reception staff no longer recorded activity on the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system so the figures now relate to the contact centre alone. Trends will no doubt become clearer as the new procedures regarding customer contact become established.

Table 12 - Electronic transactions

The Planning Services web pages continue to be amongst the most popular across the whole Council website. Particularly busy web pages in the Planning area are 'View planning applications online' and 'Apply for planning permission'. Just over half of all planning applications are now submitted online through the Planning Portal link on the Council website, and **Table 12** below shows that the authority received **306 (61%)** Portal applications during the Oct to Dec 2010 quarter, compared with **51%** during the previous quarter. All previous quarterly figures far exceed the current national target of **10%**. This provides some evidence of a degree of online self service by the customer.

Table 12 - Percentage of planning applications submitted electronically (through the national Planning Portal)

	Government target	Jan – Mar 2010	Apr – Jun 2010	Jul – Sep 2010	Oct – Dec 2010
Percentage of applications submitted online	10%	48%	50%	51%	61%

Table 13 - Scanning and Indexing

As part of the move towards achieving e-government objectives and the cultural shift towards electronic working, the service also scans and indexes all documentation relating to planning and associated applications. Whilst this work is a 'back office' function it is useful to see the volume of work involved. During the Oct to Dec 2010 quarter, the service scanned over 18,000 documents and this demonstrates that whilst the cost of printing plans may be reduced for applicants and agents, the service needs to resource scanning and indexing documentation to make them accessible for public viewing through the Council's website.

Table 13

	Jan – Mar 2010	Apr – Jun 2010	Jul – Sep 2010	Oct – Dec 2010
Total number of images scanned	22,883	21,352	27,095	18,183
Total number of images indexed	9,035	7,733	8,301	7,339

Table 14 - Customer Complaints

During the quarter Oct to Dec 2010, the Council has received the following complaints in relation to the planning service. The previous quarter figures are shown for comparison purposes. Further work is currently underway to analyse the nature of complaints received and to implement service delivery improvements where appropriate.

Table 14

Customer Complaints	Apr – Jun 10	Jul – Sep 10	Oct – Dec 10
Complaints brought forward	3	3	3
Complaints received	17	41	15
Complaint upheld	3	5	7

Complaint Not upheld	13	30	11
Complaint Partly upheld	1	5	0
Complaints carried forward	3	4	0

Table 15 - Ombudsman Complaints

The council has a corporate complaints system in place to investigate matters that customers are not happy or satisfied about in relation to the level of service that they have received from the council. However, there are circumstances where the matter has been subject to investigation by officers within the authority and the customer remains dissatisfied with the outcome of the investigation. When this happens, the customer can take their complaint to the **Local Government Ombudsman** for him to take an independent view. **Table 15** below shows a breakdown of Ombudsman complaints lodged with the Local Government Ombudsman for the previous four quarters.

Table 15

Ombudsman Complaints	Jan – Mar 10	Apr – Jun 10	Jul – Sep 10	Oct – Dec 10
Complaints brought forward	0	2	2	3
Complaints received	3	5	5	2
Complaints upheld				
<i>Local Settlement</i>				
<i>Maladministration</i>				
<i>Premature complaint</i>				
Complaints Not upheld		5	4	3
<i>Local Settlement</i>				
<i>No Maladministration</i>		2	2	3
<i>Ombudsman's Discretion</i>				
<i>Outside Jurisdiction</i>				
<i>Premature complaint</i>	1	3	2	
Complaints carried forward	2	2	3	2

Contact person	John Theobald, Data Technician, Planning and Transport Development 01225 477519
Background papers	CLG General Development Control returns PS1 and PS2 Live Tables on Development Control Statistics (http://www.communities.gov.uk/planningandbuilding/planningbuilding/planningstatistics/statisticsplanning/)
Please contact the report author if you need to access this report in an alternative format	