

**AGENDA ITEM:**

**QUARTERLY PLANNING CONTROL STATISTICS**

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**1. SUMMARY**

- 1.1 This report comments on the statistics shown on the appended table regarding the performance of the Planning Control Section in relation to planning applications and appeals over the period from October to December 2006 and for the previous four quarters.
- 1.2 For the second quarter in a row, performance levels in two categories have set new records! Performance in the Major application category has risen to 79% determined within the 13 week statutory period, the highest figure ever reported for this category. The 8 week performance figures for the Other category, comprising mainly householder applications, has risen over this quarter from 95% to 96%, again the highest figure ever reported for the category. These figures are substantially above the Government's targets for these categories and in relation to the 'Other' category equates to Croydon's own targets to achieve upper quartile performance compared to other London boroughs.
- 1.3 The performance on the 'Minor' category of applications at 82% determined within the 8 week period has slipped from that of previous quarter but is substantially above the Government's target of 65% and represents a higher level of performance than the Council was able to achieve not so long ago.

**2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Committee note the report.
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**3. BACKGROUND**

(a) Performance Targets

- 3.1 The Government has set all local planning authorities a deadline of the end of the year 2006/07 to achieve its performance targets of 60% of all major applications determined within a 13 week period, 65% of minor applications determined within 8 weeks and 80% of other applications to be determined within 8 weeks. Croydon has achieved these targets for the rolling year to March 2006 a year before the deadline set by Government.

- 3.2 The table shows performance last quarter in the Minor category has fallen from 89% applications determined within 8 weeks to 82%. The figure is well in excess of the government's target of 65% and is the second highest figure ever reported for this category. It continues an upward general trend in this category that includes the smaller residential developments (up to 10 units).
- 3.3 The performance in the 'Other Applications' category, which is the largest category including all householder applications, has risen from 95% determined within the statutory 8 week period to 96%, the highest figure ever reported in this category. Both these figures are well above the government's target of 80% for this category and show a sustained level of high performance. Croydon's own higher target of 93% determined within 8 weeks reflects anticipated upper quartile performance across London and for the first time performance has exceeded this target.
- 3.4 In relation to the Major applications category performance this quarter has risen substantially from 58% to 79%, the highest figure ever reported for this category and well above the Government's target of 60% applications determined within 13 weeks. The Major category is more volatile than the other two being based upon a much lower number of applications, many of which need a legal agreement to also be completed within the 13 week deadline. This target has been missed on some recent cases and this could adversely affect the January to March figure.
- 3.5 Whilst recent performance in this category has generally been encouraging, should the previous quarter's performance be repeated there is a danger that the Government's target would be missed and awards of Planning Delivery Grant be put at risk. The Council's score in the Environment block of the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) could also be adversely affected by such an outcome.
- 3.6 However such an outcome presently seems unlikely and the recent changes agreed to the Protocol for Committee Business to increase officer delegation on Major applications should help to sustain higher performance levels. Planning Officers are meeting colleagues in Legal and Housing to examine ways the legal agreements attached to many Major applications can also be processed within the time period on a more consistent basis. Performance in other London boroughs has been rising steadily in all categories but the 79% figure reported this time shows that progress is being made to place Croydon in the upper quartile performance in this category to which the Council aspires.

#### (b) Backlog and On-hand Totals

- 3.7 During the quarter there has been a fall in both the number of applications received and in the number of applications determined. However, the on hand total of all applications at the end of the quarter has fallen to 593, the lowest figure for some time. The average time to take a decision also continues to fall maintaining a healthy trend over the last few quarters. These reductions in the on hand totals are putting the service in a good position to enable higher performance levels to be sustained.

(c) Appeals

- 3.8 The proportion of appeals allowed or allowed in part against the Council's decisions in the October to December quarter is 36%, similar to previous quarters. This has been a variable figure in the past but is presently showing some stability. The figure compares well with those recently reported for other local authorities, particularly in the London area.

(d) Management Issues

- 3.9 The improved performance over recent quarters has been achieved through closer monitoring of applications and sustained staff levels. Monitoring has resulted in closer targeting of applications to delegated business target dates and to Committee dates. There has been little turnover of staff in the reported quarter.

**4. EQUALITIES CONSIDERATIONS**

- 4.1 There are no equalities considerations arising from this report.

**5. FINANCIAL AND STAFFING CONSIDERATIONS**

- 5.1 The financial considerations arising from this report relate mainly to the desire to maintain staffing levels of planning officers sufficient to maintain processing applications and appeals at their present levels of performance.
- 5.2 A risk of not maintaining high levels of performance is that any subsequent awards of Planning Delivery Grant for this Council could be adversely affected.
- 5.3 The on hand total of applications is coming down and Planning Control is performing more consistently but staffing levels also need to be sufficient to handle the charging for pre-application enquires service that is currently being piloted. There is also a need to review the establishment across Planning Control as a result of budget savings arising from the Customer Relations Management system recently introduced whereby staff in the Contact Centre now answers some queries that were previously handled in the back office.

**6. ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS**

- 6.1 There are no environmental considerations arising from this report.

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1.1 Statistics prepared for Development Control Committee, calculated from all applications					
Applications	Oct-Dec 2005	Jan-March 2006	April-June 2006	July-Sept 2006	Oct-Dec 2006
(i) Received	936	986	1016	1029	917
(ii) Decided	953	876	973	1018	923
(iii) Withdrawn, not determined etc	86	93	77	81	62
(iv) On hand at end of quarter	748	765	731	661	593

  

1.2 Number of applications on hand for:				
	8 weeks or less	9-12 weeks	13 or more weeks	
At 31 <sup>st</sup> December 2005	429	81	238	
At 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2006	540	40	185	
At 30 <sup>th</sup> June 2006	551	29	151	
At 30 <sup>th</sup> September 2006	492	32	137	
At 31 <sup>st</sup> December 2006	438	31	124	

2.1 Statistics prepared for DCLG Quarterly returns on certain types of application (NB does not include, for example, tree works or telecommunications proposals or applications withdrawn or not determined)							
Comparisons with previous quarters	Applications on hand at end	Total number of decisions	% applications granted	% major applications decided in 13 weeks or less	% minor applications decided in 8 weeks or less	% all other applications decided in 8 weeks or less	Average weeks to decision
Oct-Dec 2005	682	852	67	66	74	83	10.6
Jan-March 2006	708	773	68	64	70	82	11.0
April-June 2006	681	862	66	72	78	92	9.4
July-Sept 2006	610	906	57	58	89	95	8.6
Oct-Dec 2006	560	<b>808</b>	66	<b>79</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>96</b>	8.2
Performance for year 2006/07 to 31 <sup>st</sup> December 2006				69	84	94	
LB Croydon BVPP Target for year 2006/07				65	85	92	
Government Targets (by 2006/07)				60	65	80	

3 Appeal Results		
3.1	The percentage of all appeals decided over period 01/10/06 to 31/12/06 which were allowed or allowed in part	34%
3.2	The number of these appeals allowed against the authority's decision to refuse on planning applications (BVPI 204).	36%
3.2 Comparison with previous quarters		
	July-Sept 2006	36%
	April-June 2006	37%

**Rory Macleod**  
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