

## BABERGH DISTRICT COUNCIL and MID SUFFOLK DISTRICT COUNCIL

|                               |   |
|-------------------------------|---|
| <b>From: Head of Economy</b>  | <b>Report Number: M104</b>              |
| <b>To: Strategy Committee</b> | <b>Date of meeting: 18 October 2012</b> |

### INTERIM PLANNING PERFORMANCE ACTION PLAN

#### 1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To set out the proposed interim actions to enable an appropriate improvement in planning performance and good customer service in the Planning Development Management teams.
- 1.2 To ensure that the planning services at both Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils are fit for purpose by 31 March 2013 to enable the successful integration and transformation of these services.

#### 2. Recommendation to Council

- 2.1 That Members agree the principle behind the proposed improvement plan and recommend to Council that the monies set out in paragraph 3.1 of the report are allocated from Council reserves.

#### 3. Financial Implications

- 3.1 The total cost of the additional measures for the next 6 months equate to £134,000 with Babergh District Council meeting £75,000 of the total costs and Mid Suffolk District Council meeting £58,500. These monies cannot be met from allotted revenue budgets and so it is proposed that it will be funded from reserves and the decision as to whether that is from general or earmarked reserves will be made at the end of the year as part of the overall outturn position.

| Action   | 6 month cost   | Split between BDC and MSDC |
|--|--|----------------------------|
| Increase Planning Officer capacity             | £35000   | 50% BDC<br>50% MSDC        |
| Increase Conservation Officer capacity         | £20000   | 100% BDC                   |
| Increase Planning Enforcement Officer capacity | Partially covered by existing budget so require £15000 | 100% MSDC                  |

| Action   | 6 month cost                   | Split between BDC and MSDC |
|--|--------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Increase Technical Officer Capacity (2 Officers) | £20000                         | 50% BDC<br>50% MSDC        |
| Increase Senior Policy Officer Capacity          | £24000                         | 75% BDC<br>25% MSDC        |
| Increase Policy Officer Capacity                 | £20,000                        | 50% MSDC<br>50% BDC        |
| Total costs<br>BDC<br>MSDC<br>Total Costs        | £75,500<br>£58,500<br>£134,000 |                            |

#### 4. Risk Management

- 4.1 This report is most closely linked with the Council's Corporate / Significant Business Risk No. T1. Key risks are set out below:

| Risk Description  | Likelihood | Impact | Mitigation Measures      |
|---|------------|--------|--------------------------|
| T1 Failure to integrate services in accordance with the business case leads to full benefits of joint service delivery not being achieved | Medium     | High   | Detailed in this report. |

#### 5. Consultations

- 5.1 Underpinning these proposals are discussions with applicants and other users of the service although they have not formally been consulted on the proposals.

#### 6. Equality Analysis

- 6.1 No equality analysis has been undertaken for the purposes of this report.

#### 7. Shared Service / Partnership Implications

- 7.1 See key risks.

#### 8. Key Information

- 8.1 In recent weeks it has become clear that the performance of both Planning Services needs to be improved and presents a significant risk to the Councils' integration business plan.

8.2 An interim improvement plan has been drafted detailing how the Services intend to address a number of performance and customer service issues and monitor the success of the proposed plan.

8.3 The issues identified include

- a) Poor PS2 results (BDC). Planning performance is judged by the Government using the PS2 statistic.
- b) Poor decision making timescales at both BDC and MSDC for both applications and enquiries.
- c) Increasing levels of customer dissatisfaction with the service.
- d) Lack of officer capacity to adequately address the Councils` priorities in this area. Officer capacity is insufficient to address the integration of the services at the same time as the development of the operational development teams, along with meeting day to day workload targets.
- e) The loss of capacity in the Planning Enforcement Team and a significant backlog of work at MSDC.

8.4 The recommended measures to address the above issues are set out below. They have been designed to address the underlying causes of the issues and details have also been provided of the likely impact of the measures.

| <b>Cause</b>  | <b>Action and Cost</b>  | <b>Owner</b>      | <b>Impact and Measure</b>   |
|---|---|-------------------|---|
| Lack of Planning Officer capacity at BDC  | Recruit one planning officer (Concentrating on BDC cases) for an interim period (for six months £17500) | Philip Isbell     | <b>Officer resource increased.</b><br>End to end decision timescale on applications reduces.<br>Total application caseload reduces.   |
| Lack of Planning Officer capacity at both BDC and MSDC. Earlier attempts to deal with lack of capacity at BDC by “shifting” MSDC resources. | Recruit one planning officer (Concentrating on MSDC cases for an interim period (for six months £17500) | Christine Thurlow | <b>Officer resource increased.</b><br>End to end decision timescale on applications reduces<br><b>Increased Officer Capacity to deal with Enquiries</b><br>End to end timescales on Enquiries reduces.<br><b>Invalid Applications dealt with more quickly</b><br>Registration timescales of invalid applications reduces. |

| <b>Cause</b>                          | <b>Action and Cost</b>   | <b>Owner</b>                        | <b>Impact and Measure</b>   |
|---------------------------------------|--|-------------------------------------|---|
| Lack of Conservation Officer capacity | Recruit one Qualified Conservation Officer for an interim period (for six months £20000)                               | Nick Ward                           | <p><b>Heritage Officer resource increased.</b></p> <p>Grade 1 and Grade 2* applications dealt with by experienced Heritage Officers.</p> <p><b>Increased Officer Capacity to deal with Enquiries</b></p> <p>End to end timescales on Enquiries reduces.</p> <p><b>Consultation Responses dealt with within 21days</b></p> |
| Loss of Enforcement Officer Capacity  | Engage one Planning Enforcement Consultant for an Interim period (£40000)  | Ben Elvin                           | <p><b>Enforcement Officer capacity increased.</b></p> <p>(Enforcement caseload reduces at MSDC)</p> <p>(Response times to enforcement cases reduces at MSDC)</p>  |
| Lack of Technical Officer capacity    | Recruit two additional "Technical level" Officers, one for each Council for an interim period (for six months £20000). | Philip Isbell and Christine Thurlow | <p><b>Discharge of Conditions dealt with by Technical Officers freeing up Planning Officer time</b></p> <p>(Discharge of Conditions timescales reduce)</p> <p>(End to end timescales on applications reduce)</p>  |
| Poor customer service levels          | Customer Service expectations communicated to staff and reinforced. Training provided where needed.                    | All                                 | <p><b>Levels of customer Service increases</b></p> <p><b>Customer perception of service increases</b></p> <p>(Active customers asked to rate service over time)</p>   |
| Poor Caseload Management              | Assess outstanding work and the status of each case. Devise action plan to prioritise workload.                        | Philip Isbell/ Christine Thurlow    | <p><b>Levels of customer Service increases</b></p> <p><b>Customer perception of service increases</b></p> <p>(Caseloads show reduction)</p> <p>(End to End decision timescale on applications reduces)</p>  |

| Cause   | Action and Cost  | Owner      | Impact and Measure   |
|---|--|------------|--|
| Lack of experienced resource in Planning Policy | <p>Recruit experienced planning policy officer to support manager with BDC core strategy and SAAP.</p> <p>Recruit planning policy planner to maintain current progress on CIL and support advice on current and planned developments including Neighbourhood Plans</p> | Rich Cooke | <p><b>Increase the resilience of successful completion of the BDC core strategy, MSDC core strategy review and SAAP.</b></p> <p>Plans all successfully adopted.</p> <p><b>Ensure delivery of CIL and infrastructure requirements.</b></p> <p><b>Provide support to growth initiatives.</b></p> <p>CIL in place and enquiries and support to the planning process in place.</p> |

8.5 Costs have been assessed for additional resources for the next 6 months. The impact of the plan will be closely monitored and a further report will be prepared for Members showing progress made at the three and six month stage and any measures that need to continue for a further period beyond the six months.

## 9. Appendices

None

## 10. Background Documents

None

Authorship:  
Peter Burrows  
Head of Economy

01449 724503 / 01473 826649  
Peter.burrows@midsuffolk.gov.uk