

## ISSUES PAPER

<b>TITLE</b>	Planning Enforcement Service
<b>FOR CONSIDERATION BY</b>	Overview and Scrutiny Committee
<b>REPORT PREPARED BY</b>	Heather Thwaites, Director of Environment

**PURPOSE OF REPORT**

To report the action plan for improvements to the planning enforcement service in line with the outcome and recommendations of the independent review of the Planning Enforcement Service.

**BACKGROUND**

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee received a request to review the Planning Enforcement Service. In response to this, an independent review was commissioned by officers and this was undertaken by John Silvester Associates and took place in Summer 2013. The report was received September 2013 and the OSC considered a report on 7<sup>th</sup> January 2014. At this stage, it was agreed that the action plan and customer charter would be prepared and presented to a future meeting of the OSC. The action plan and charter are attached to this report.

**The action plan**

The Silvester Report reviewed the current enforcement service and stakeholder perceptions of the service. The report made a number of recommendations to improve the service in line with best practice. In the OSC report in January, the conclusions of the review were addressed and 3 main areas for improvements were identified.

These were namely :-

- Manage expectations
- Improve Communication and involvement
- Develop a more proactive service

The action plan has been developed to address the above and focuses on staffing and resources, policy and procedures and customer and stakeholder engagement and communication. Many of the actions outlined in the action plan have already been implemented. These include the following:-

- Staffing and resource has been addressed through the corporate management restructure and additional officer support is being secured
- A more proactive approach and zero tolerance approach has been taken to address sites that are having significant impacts in terms of safety and amenity. Examples of action include the use of injunctions and prosecutions, stop notices.
- A draft Enforcement Local Plan has been produced and is being reviewed. This will prioritise cases and be subject to full consultation with customers and stakeholders
- A Legal Officer has been identified to support the service for all regulatory issues
- A charter to reflect standards of service has been produced (attached)
- More effective use has been made of communications and a communications plan is being developed

- The IT system replacement project is underway with implementation programmed for end 2014/15
- The corporate enforcement group has been established and meetings with Building Control to identify opportunities for compliance checking
- Compliance officer posts have been advertised
- Corporate resources to consider the website improvements have been identified and being put in place
- The Customer Programme is underway
- Replacement of the GIS system project has commenced

### **Next steps**

While many of the actions to implement improvements to the service are underway, the work to implement the action plan is significant and has led to higher caseloads. The nature of the work has become more complex and involves preparing notices and court cases. For example, the appeals and prosecutions have increased as a result of enforcement notices being served and the number and cost of public Inquiries and court action has risen significantly. The next steps are to put in place additional temporary officer resource to enable the work set out in the action plan to be realised. The funding for this has been secured and officers are in the process of putting the extra resource in place and this scheduled to take place over the next month.

In addition, over the next few months, the service will work on the Enforcement Local Plan. This will address many of the recommendations of the Silvester Report in terms of setting priorities and targets, policies and guidelines. The adoption of an enforcement local plan has been advocated by central government in recently produced planning guidance. This will be widely consulted upon and formally adopted by the Council to ensure that it has “buy in” from the users of the service including customers, the Town and Parish Councils and ward members.

Much of the improvement will be incremental given that these are interrelated with, and dependent on improvements to service that have a corporate focus. In particular, the IT systems and customer programme are integral to improvements in planning the enforcement service. It is envisaged that improved communication and customer focus will be achieved through working with the corporate teams to address the website, the GIS system and the 5 year customer work programme. While this corporate focus will increase the ability of the service to achieve the improvements identified, it may increase the timescales in enabling these being realised.

The work associated with communications and the town and parish councils has been and will continue to be ongoing. However, it is intended that for the next few months, work should be focused on resource and policy which in itself will improve responsiveness. Once these areas are in place, a more proactive approach will be adopted to implementing the specific actions in the action plan associated with communication. This will include Town and Parish Workshops, training events and reviewing all correspondence with the service.

### **Comments from John Kaiser- Executive Member for General Planning:-**

“The service has made excellent progress in implementing many of the recommendations of the independent review and there is a strong commitment in moving forward to enable all of the actions outlined in the action plan to be implemented.”

## **Summary**

In summary, the action plan sets out the actions that will be undertaken by the service in order to make improvements in line with the recommendations of the Silvester Report. Significant work has already been undertaken to implement these actions. The budget has been secured for additional officer resource. Over the coming months, the service will focus on putting in place these resources and developing policy and procedures that will lead to improvements overall and in themselves, will result in improvement to communication with customer and stakeholders and improvements to customer service. Once the resource and policy are in place in place, the specific actions in the plan to address customer service will be undertaken in line with the corporate actions associated with the IT, website review and the customer programme.

	<b>Actions</b>	<b>Outcome</b>	<b>Timescales</b>	<b>Ownership</b>	<b>Resources</b>	<b>Risk (1low-5 high )</b>
<b>Staffing /resources</b>	Review of Staffing structure and recruitment Look at opportunity for one additional Senior/Principal Planning Officer Recruit to existing vacant post One new communications / admin/technical officer	Properly resourced team to deliver action plan	April/May 2011	Head of DM	Funding identified and staff resource being appointed	Attracting high calibre staff in an enforcement role  2
	Legal officer – dedicated legal officer for planning enforcement	Improve timescales for action and a more proactive/less risk averse approach to enforcement work	Agreed and in place	Legal service and Head of DM	Extra funding to backfill legal services post has been identified within budget	1 - in place
	Staff training and development	Encourage Technical Membership of RTPI  Common career grade structure with PO – Job Description review	2014 and on going	Service Manager/Enforcement Team	Training budget in place and time for training	2

		<p>Membership of SE EO group and other bench- marking and liaison groups to share best practice</p> <p>Performance management – dials</p> <p>PO to undertaken some enforcement work</p>				
IT	<p>Review IT systems - ability to provide updates, flag up outstanding cases, integration with other DM data base and across the organisation)</p>	<p>Improve Customer/stakeholder information</p> <p>Improved Case management</p> <p>General efficiencies</p>	<p>ILap replacement project has commenced implementation 2014/15</p> <p>GIS review project-implementation 2013/14</p> <p>Customer focus corporate project commenced – 5 year programme</p>	DM/corporate IT	<p>ILap replacement identified budget secured</p> <p>GIS replacement within corporate budget</p> <p>Customer service improvement – corporate project – ongoing commitment and budget</p>	<p>2 – commenced</p> <p>3- corporate project</p>

<b>Policy and Procedure</b>	Development of an Enforcement local plan	Set service standards and targets Manage expectations of stakeholders. Facilitates monitor, review and improvement	-Draft has been prepared - Consultation later summer/ - Adoption end of 2014	Head of DM/Service Manager and Enforcement team	Consultation time/resource	1
	Prepare an Enforcement Charter	Clear statement of what stake holders And customers can expect from the enforcement service	Draft prepared in line with current standards to be reviewed following consultation and adoption of the enforcement local plan	Head of DM - Enforcement team	Within service budget	1
<b>Performance</b>	Monitor and review of targets and necessary actions/changes	Focus on service review and improvement	Implementation of ILAP replacement 2014/2015	Business support manager/Service Manager and enforcement team	ILAP replacement – corporate budget secured	2 2

	Regular case review meetings (officer)	Clear and agreed management of enforcement priorities and cases	Implemented and on- going	Enforcement team Service Manager/ officers and legal services	Part of general management of the service by the Enforcement Team	1
	Corporate working with other regulatory regimes	Coordinated enforcement action	Corporate enforcement group established	Corporate cross service enforcement team	Staffing implications	2 – already commenced
	Proactive monitoring (5%)	Proactive monitoring of compliance. Improved reputation and customer/member view of the service	April 2014 + Compliance officer posts being advertised	Service Manager/ Enforcement Team/Building control Team/ delivery compliance officers	Staffing for additional compliance checking	2-3 – dependant of resource
<b>Ward member and Town/parish involvement</b>	Annual enforcement forum (ward members/parish Council)	Improved communication and understanding Stake holder feedback to help continuous improvement	Summer 2014 and then annual	Head of DM/ Service Manager and Enforcement Team	Limited resource for the forum but actions agreed may have considerable resource implications	1
	Review information to members – P committee Ward members	Improved communication	Summer 2014 +	Head of DM/Service Manager/Enforcement team and Business support manager	Technical /admin/communications officer	1

	Ward and town/parish Member training	Increased understanding to the system and its limitations to manage expectation	Summer 2014	Head of DM/Service manager /Enforcement team	Potentially considerable Staff resource	3
	Quarterly Member /officer working group	Communication with members about enforcement cases and issues	Summer 2014 and then as agreed by group	Service Manager/Enforcement team/ legal/executive members/chairman planning committee/other members	Buy in and time from Members. Enforcement Team	2
	Annual monitoring	Increased corporate commination and involvement in enforcement work and the service	January 2014 present review and action plan and then annually	Service Manager/Business support manager and enforcement team	Report to be prepared annually - Technical /admin/communications officer	1
	Planning committee involvement in high profile cases	Improve publicity to cases, the service and the approach the Council is taking and involvement and ownership by members.	Commenced	Head of DM/Service Manager and officers	Reports to be written but will be limited in number	1
<b>Customer focus /comms</b>	Review standard letters and correspondence	Improved communication with stakeholders	Early 2014	Service Manager/Enforcement Team	One off piece of work but with significant time implications Enforcement Team	2



	Proactive use of media and other means of communication	To improve the reputation of the service and to deter future perpetrators from taking advantage of the system.	Current and On-going Improved use of comms commenced	Head of DM/Service Manager/Corporate communications team and DM officers	Enforcement Team – building relationships with communications team and the media may take some time	2/3 Work commenced with comms team and plan to be further developed.
	Review and Update website (dedicated section, policies, updates on cases)	Clear advice to service users about policy and process. Publication of success to improve the reputation of the enforcement service	Early 2014 and on-going	DM - Enforcement team and Corporate comms team	On-going regular update/input from DM New Technical /admin/communications officer	2 – work and meeting already undertaken. Corporate resource being identified.
	Review service from Wokingham Direct – regular communication	Improving communication with customers and relieving enforcement team from enquiries improve their productivity.	Early 2014 and on-going	Head of DM/Service Manager/WD	On-going regular update/input from DM	1