
New Ways of Working review final report – Development and Planning

**Committee considering
report:**

Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission
on 15 January 2019

Report Author:

David Lowe

Purpose of the Report

To present to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission the final report submitted to the Corporate Programme Board – setting out the findings of the New Ways of Working review for the Development and Planning service

Recommendation

That the Commission notes the contents of the report.

1. Introduction / Background

- 1.1 This document provides a report on the findings of the Development and Planning New Ways of Working (NWOW) review that was submitted to the Corporate Programme Board on 18 October 2018.

New Ways of Working review final report – Development and Planning

Committee **considering** Corporate Programme Board
report:

Date of Committee: 18 October 2018

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Purpose of the Report

To present to Corporate Programme Board the findings of the New Ways of Working review for the Development and Planning service

Recommendations

That Programme Board:

- **notes the content of the report**
- **approves the improvement actions for implementation**

The review team would like to thank all the managers and staff of the Development and Planning service for their support of and contribution to this review.

Executive Summary

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This report sets out to Corporate Programme Board the findings of the New Ways of Working (NWOW) review for the Development and Planning Service.

2. Background

- 2.1 The New Ways of Working reviews were introduced in 2017 to examine the way in which each of the Council's functional units are delivered and how they will continue to be delivered over the next five years. This includes an assessment of whether they should continue to be provided. The reviews are taking place in order to ensure that services are sustainably, effectively and efficiently delivered to residents. The Development and Planning service review is the first to be completed.
- 2.2 Through analysis of data, feedback and information from multiple sources, the review team has considered potential service improvements, opportunities for generating income and alternative models of delivery to inform an improvement plan for the service.

3. Service overview

- 3.1 The Development and Planning service comprises four teams; Planning and Transport Policy (PTP), Development Control (DC), Planning Services (PS) and Housing. For the purpose of the review, DC and PS have been considered as a single entity.
- 3.2 The Planning and Transport Policy team has a number of duties including responsibility for planning policy, conservation and listed buildings, minerals and waste, transport policy, ecology, developer contributions and economic development.
- 3.3 The Development Control and Planning Services teams are responsible for the processing of planning applications, including consultation, appeals and planning enforcement.
- 3.4 The Housing Team manages the Common Housing Register, and provides a number of services including Housing Options, homelessness advice and housing grants and loans. The team is also responsible for housing strategy and enabling, and fulfilling the statutory homeless duty.
- 3.5 The services provided by each of the teams include both statutory duties and discretionary activities.

4. The teams in detail

Demand

- 4.1** The demand on the PTP team is primarily the requirement to produce and update statutory plans but there has been an increasing demand from other time-critical activities, such as responding to planning appeals and dealing with NDPs. Opportunities to seek grant funding have also put additional demand on resources within the team.
- 4.2** Whilst there exists a significant demand on resources generated by the rejection of the majority of applications as invalid, a recent decline in the number of planning applications offers an opportunity to assess whether staffing resources, within the PS and DC teams, could be reduced.
- 4.3** The current lack of collection and analysis of relevant data makes it difficult to identify the exact pressures upon the Housing team but it is acknowledged that the impact of the new duties imposed by the Homelessness Reduction Act must continue to be reviewed to ensure that the team is able to meet demand.

Performance

- 4.4** PTP performance is primarily measured through the meeting of a number of local project milestones, and appears to be broadly in line with comparators although this can be impacted if key staff are required for urgent activity elsewhere.
- 4.5** Whilst performance is improving, the PS and DC teams are not yet determining planning applications in line with the national average. There is also a need for an improvement in the quality and timeliness of information provided to developers.
- 4.6** The absence of activity measurement for the Housing team has resulted in the provision of only a partial picture of the team's performance. A detailed review of the Housing team has been recommended.

5. Resources

Finance

- 5.1** PTP sits in the middle of the CIPFA nearest neighbour group, across most benchmarking comparisons, and income from planning applications for the DC / PS teams, is also average across other Berkshire authorities. Fee income against staff costs in DC is relatively low and Housing net costs are high.
- 5.2** A number of opportunities to maximise income and widen the scope for charging, across the service, have been identified within the report.

Staffing

- 5.3** The review team has identified some areas within DC / PS and Housing teams that could support a flatter model, with generalists fulfilling initial processing roles, supported by digital technology, and specialists dealing with more complex issues and operational matters. Sickness rates in Housing and appraisal completion rates across the whole service, were identified as areas for improvement.

Information and Communication

- 5.4** In reviewing the opportunities to better utilise information and communication across the service, the review team has identified a number of improvements including the digitisation of historic records and better access to ICT systems in other services, process improvement in DC / PS to reduce the amount of duplication of activity, integrated scanning systems and greater use of digital channels for Housing contact and the management of rental income.

Stakeholder feedback

- 5.5** Stakeholders were consulted as part of the review process and client dissatisfaction with Housing suggests that there might be some scope for examination of customer service practices within the team. It has also been recommended that a wider list of suggestions from staff should be examined by management and feedback given to staff on the viability of their suggestions.

Alternative models of service delivery

- 5.6** Alternative models of delivery were considered and, while it was concluded that there appeared to be little merit in fundamentally changing the way in which the service's activities are delivered, some other options such as services being delivered elsewhere within the Council could be further explored. It was acknowledged however that these opportunities would be limited in both scope and financial benefit. The outsourcing of the management of gypsy and traveller sites, although suggested by the service, has been discounted. The review team has strongly recommended that the handling of Housing telephone calls be transferred to the Call Centre.

6. Conclusions

- 6.1** Overall, as might be expected for an examination of a service with a span of sometimes unconnected activities through a review with such a broad remit, condensing a judgment on its strategy and operation in a succinct fashion is difficult.
- 6.2** It is, however, clear that there are a number of improvement actions that could be taken that should, if implemented properly, simultaneously enhance the service's contribution to the Authority's strategic objectives, improve the customer experience and, through the removal of operational impediments, have a positive effect for those working in the service.

7. Future Action

- 7.1** Twenty five individual improvement actions have been identified which will be incorporated into a delivery plan to be overseen and monitored by the Corporate Programme Office.
- 7.2** The scale of the work required would indicate that outside expertise and assistance will be required to ensure that the required outcomes are achieved.

New Ways of Working review final report – Development and Planning

1. Introduction

1.1 This report sets out to Corporate Programme Board the findings of the New Ways of Working (NWOW) review for the Development and Planning Service. In doing so it provides:

- (1) Background on the NWOW process, including information on the evolution and scope of the process and the methodology used;
- (2) An overview of the service's policy background and the teams within it;
- (3) Detailed pictures of each of the teams: their activities, demand and performance trends, financial synopses, staffing data and trends, their use of information and communication technologies, the views of their stakeholders and commentary on the options for changing the service delivery model;
- (4) The conclusions drawn on strategic alignment, efficiency and effectiveness, workforce reorganisation and the use of ICT and any other identified matters;
- (5) Recommendations for policy or strategic change, operational delivery and the service's management team.

2. Background

2.1 The aim of the NWOW programme is to review the way in which each of the Council's functional units are delivered over the next five years, including assessments of whether they should continue to be provided, in order to ensure that we deliver effective and efficient services to our residents that are sustainable and make full use of the potential provided by our people, our money and digital technology.

2.2 The reviews have the following objectives:

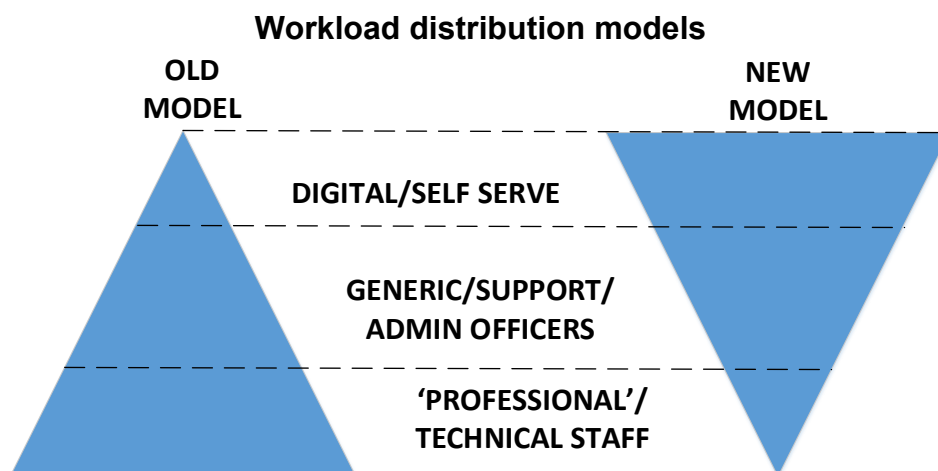
- (1) To agree the most appropriate delivery model for each service, for example one, or a combination, of
 - In-service provision
 - In-Council service provision
 - Partnership or shared service
 - Charitable trust
 - Mutual / co-operative
 - Wholly owned "Teckal" company
 - Joint Venture company
 - Private sector delivery (outsource)
 - Devolution to third tier councils

(2) By using data and information from all sources, to identify the potential for service improvements by

- Developing structures, systems and processes that empower our staff by
 - ensuring decision-making takes place at the most appropriate level
 - allowing specialist skills and knowledge to be applied to their best effect
 - reducing duplication
 - automating where possible
- Exploiting the use of digital technologies to
 - allow our residents to do more for themselves
 - make our business processes more efficient and effective
- Being financially astute through
 - reducing demand
 - the avoidance of costs
 - the reduction of costs
 - generating income

(3) To develop a clear and SMART improvement and implementation plan for each Service.

2.3 The key principle on which the achievement of the aim at paragraph 2.1 is based in part (it excludes work on localities and strategic commissioning) on Wokingham Borough Council's '21st Century Council' programme being implemented by the company 'Ignite'. Known as the Three Tier model, it postulates that, through making more use of digital technology (for self-service by the public and automating some decision making) and training generalist or support officers to deal with high volume / low complexity transactions, technical or 'professional' officers can be freed to work on those tasks that require the application of their specialist knowledge. This is, in effect, reversing or inverting the traditional model of workload distribution, allowing efficiencies to be realised. This is demonstrated in the diagram below:



2.4 The review process examines key metrics (demand, measures of volume, performance, finance and staffing) to assess the wider operational efficiency

of each team. The Council's data have been benchmarked against those of other, 'nearest neighbour' authorities where it has been possible to obtain them.

- 2.5** In addition to the examination of internal and external data, the reviews have considered the service's use of technology and sought the view of a number of stakeholders, including staff, managers, Councillors and customer/client groups.
- 2.6** Feedback was sought through SWOT sessions undertaken with staff, service managers, the Director for Economy and Environment, the Executive Members and backbench Councillors. Primarily this has been used to inform lines of enquiry or to triangulate information gathered from other sources.
- 2.7** Surveys of clients were also undertaken for Development Control/Planning Service and for Housing.
- 2.8** Generally, stakeholder feedback has been reflected in this report in the appropriate sections.
- 2.9** Further details of the information underpinning this report may be found [here](#) for Planning & Transport Policy; [here](#) for Development Control/Planning Services and [here](#) for Housing. Some of the data contained within these links are now no longer current.

3. Service Overview

3.1 Development and Planning comprises four teams:

- Planning and Transport Policy (PTP)
- Development Control (DC)
- Planning Services (PS)
- Housing

3.2 Detail on the teams' activities is shown in the table at paragraph 4.1.

3.3 As their functions overlap, for the purposes of this review DC and PS have been considered as a single entity.

3.4 The service assumed its current form following the 2017 Senior Management Review (SMR4), when Housing was added to the three planning teams (PTP, DC and PS) and the economic development function was transferred from Strategic Support to PTP. The overall intent for these moves was to strengthen the Authority's approach to 'development and [economic] growth'.

3.5 Delivery of the strategic agenda has involved:

- The establishment of an Economic Development Board to shape and direct local economic development activity to the delivery of strategic rather than operational outcomes (focussed on affordable housing and being 'open for business'). Work is ongoing with Strategy Board on an economic development strategy.
- The Council has entered into a Joint Venture with Sovereign Housing to bring together the land, investment and skills of the two organisations to help towards achieving the Authority's target to provide 1,000 new affordable homes in the district by 2020.
- The provision of additional staffing resource for Housing Enabling (the position is in the Housing team and works across PTP and DC) to contribute to Local Plan housing policies.
- Restructuring DC to give greater focus on support to commercial planning applicants.

3.6 Planning policies for economic development and growth will be reviewed and refocussed as part of Local Plan review project.

3.7 The service has been, and will be, subject to the national and local initiatives and influences as set out in the sections below:

Planning & Transport Policy

3.7.1 New legislation requires Local Planning Authorities to review their Local Plans at least every five years. The Authority tends to have a rolling review of its Local Plan but there will be direct resource impact for Minerals and Waste planning where there is only resource in place for the current local plan. There is a pressure bid to seek to make this resource permanent.

- 3.7.2 There is a revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). Each revision to the NPPF results in new requirements that have to be met to ensure that a Local Development Plan is found to be sound.
- 3.7.3 Legislation allowing local communities to develop local planning frameworks, through Neighbourhood Development Plans, has placed a statutory duty on local councils to support their delivery and for their adoption. Consequently more demand is being placed on the team as more local communities progress plans in their areas and ever increasing amounts of evidence are needed to support the plans' delivery and examination. Some Council members would like to see more use being made of them locally.
- 3.7.4 Funding for the development of transport initiatives, for example the Transport Plan, has moved to a 'bidding' model, where applications for money need to be supported by local evidence and plans.
- 3.7.5 The Council is taking forward, as priorities, the development of the local economy and the building of affordable housing.

Development Control and Planning Service

- 3.7.6 The government has introduced or will be making changes to:
- The National Planning Policy Framework
 - Planning Practice Guidance.
 - The provisions in the General Permitted Development Order.
- 3.7.7 The impact of these changes is not yet known, although it is likely that they will affect the application and operation of housing supply figures, but the changes will require adjustment to local policies.
- 3.7.8 The power to charge increased planning fees, with a requirement to invest the revenue in DC to improve performance, has been created by government and has been adopted by the team. This has allowed an increase in staffing numbers.
- 3.7.9 The team is facing rising demand from developers appealing the Council's policy position and application decisions based on its 'five year housing land supply'.
- 3.7.10 Locally, councillors have directed that the use of Local Development Orders should be pursued (the pilot at New Greenham Park is providing learning opportunities) and have emphasised their desire that greater weight should be given to Economic Development as a material consideration in the determination of planning applications. This will require updated local plan policies.
- 3.7.11 The potential development in the Grazeley area is providing opportunities for the evolution of cross-border arrangements.

Housing

- 3.7.12 Through the Homelessness Reduction Act, there has been a complete shift in the national approach to the prevention of homelessness. This includes substantially increased statutory requirements which have required re-engineering of the Housing Operation Team's activities and increasing resource.
- 3.7.13 There is a recognised need for local policies and strategies to be updated.
- 3.7.14 The government has introduced a Rough Sleeping Strategy to reduce street homelessness. The Authority has successfully bid for short term funding (£200k) for additional temporary resource.
- 3.7.15 The team is moving away from the use of bed and breakfast accommodation for homeless families towards the use of temporary accommodation. A capital investment project to purchase the necessary homes is underway.

Comment

Many of the prerequisites for the service to succeed as set out in SMR have been put into place but there is still work to do, particularly around the Local Plan and the updating of local housing policies and strategies. **See Recommendations: DP10/DP22**

4. The Teams in detail

4.1 Activities

4.1.1 The teams carry out the activities shown in the sub-sections below.

Planning and Transport Policy

Sub team	Activity	Statutory/ Discretionary
Planning Policy (links to DC and Housing)	• Local Plan	Statutory
	• Neighbourhood Development Plan	Statutory
	• Planning Applications Consultation Responses	Discretionary
	• Planning Appeals	Discretionary
Conservation/Listed Buildings (links to DC)	• Conservation Area Appraisal	Discretionary
	• Listed Building Planning Applications (provision of technical comment)	Statutory
Minerals & Waste	• Minerals and Waste Local Plan	Statutory
	• Minerals and Waste Planning Applications	Statutory
Transport Policy (links to DC)	• Local Transport Plan	Statutory
	• Commenting on planning applications	Discretionary
	• Grant / Fund Applications and Implementation	Discretionary
Ecology (links to DC)	• Commenting on planning applications	Discretionary
	• Local Plans technical advice	Discretionary
Developer Contributions	• Community Infrastructure Levy	Statutory once adopted
	• S106	Statutory if required
	• CIL Appeals	Discretionary
Economic Development (links to DC)	• Economic Development Guidance	Discretionary
	• Economic Development Promotion	Discretionary

Development Control

Sub team	Activity	Statutory/ Discretionary
Development Control (links to all Policy and Housing)	• Support of Receipt, validation, registration of planning applications	Statutory
	Planning application assessment and determination	Statutory

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-apps 	Discretionary
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appeals 	Discretionary
Planning Enforcement (links to all Policy)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enforcement 	Discretionary

Planning Services

Sub team	Activity	Statutory/ Discretionary
Planning Services (links to all Policy and Housing)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Receipt, validation, registration of planning applications 	Statutory
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consultations 	Statutory / Discretionary
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appeals 	Discretionary

Housing

Sub team	Activity	Statutory/ Discretionary
Common Housing Register	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Management of the CHR 	Statutory
Housing Options	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gypsy and Traveller Site Management – Four Houses Corner 	Statutory
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rough Sleepers 	Statutory
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Common Housing Register/CBL 	Statutory
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Temporary Accommodation – B&B/Property portfolio 	Statutory
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discretionary Housing Payments 	Statutory
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multi-Agency Partnerships 	Statutory
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic Functions/meetings 	Statutory
Homelessness Reduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homeless Prevention support and advice 	Statutory
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homeless people/families 	Statutory
Housing Strategy and Enabling (links to DC and Planning Policy)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing Strategy 	Discretionary
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing Enabling 	Discretionary
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corporate Projects 	Discretionary
Housing Grants & Loans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disabled Facilities Grants 	Statutory
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Home Improvements Grants & Loans 	Statutory

4.2 Demand

4.2.1 Commentary on the demands affecting each team and the measures of volume they record is shown in the sub-sections below:

Planning and Transport Policy

- 4.2.1.1 The team reports on a number of very local performance indicators and measures of volume, the nature of which make it difficult to compare against other like authorities.
- 4.2.1.2 Most demand on the team is generated by the requirement to produce and update statutory plans, which run on established time cycles. There has, however, been an increase in demand on the team generated by rising numbers of other, time-critical, activities such as responding to planning appeals and dealing with NDPs. These can have consequential effects on core work.
- 4.2.1.3 There are opportunities for the Authority to access funding for transport policy activities with the Transport Policy Team successfully being awarded in excess of £13m in grant funding in recent years.

Comment

The predictability of activity and the consequent ability to plan and schedule the activity is being undermined by the need to react to incoming appeals and NDPs. **See Recommendation: DP10**

Transport Policy grant funding offers the opportunity for more income for the Authority. **See Recommendations: DP02/DP06**

Planning Services and Development Control

- 4.2.1.4 Following a rise in the number of applications received by the team, the last two years have seen a decline.
- 4.2.1.5 62% of applications received are rejected as being invalid, generating failure demand.
- 4.2.1.6 Demand for Planning Enforcement steadily averages around 800 new cases per year.

Comment

The decline in application numbers offers an opportunity to assess whether the staffing resources allocated to their handling and management could be reduced. **See Recommendation: DP14**

Failure demand for the registration of applications is significant. **See Recommendation: DP18/DP20**

Housing

- 4.2.1.7 The Authority operates an 'open' housing register and the number of new housing applications received has reduced by 23% to 1814 in 2017/18 following relatively stable numbers during the previous three years.
- 4.2.1.8 Following the introduction in Quarter 2 2015/16 of new criteria requiring a local connection for two years, the number of qualifying live applications on the Common Housing register has reduced over the last three years to 408 in 2017/18. Staff in the team, however, consider that initial demand for, and enquiries about, the CHR remain as high as in previous years. Unfortunately, however, this measure of volume, along with others, is not recorded by the team.
- 4.2.1.9 Benchmarking data shows that the total number of households on the housing waiting list in West Berkshire remained lower than CIPFA average levels (and followed a similar reduction trend over the last 6 years to 2016/17).
- 4.2.1.10 The overall limit for Discretionary Housing Payment has increased over the last three years but remains below CIPFA averages which followed an identical pattern.
- 4.2.1.11 Demand from clients facing homelessness will rise as the Authority complies with duties imposed by the Homelessness Reduction Act; managers are already report a doubling in homelessness caseloads. It is also anticipated that the introduction of Universal Credit will increase demand on the team.

Comment

The impact of the new duties imposed by the Homelessness Reduction Act will need to be kept under review to ensure that the team continues to be able to meet demand. **See Recommendation: DP22**

Demand on the team appears to be reducing, although staff report that is not their experience. The collection and analysis of relevant data should improve the management picture. **See Recommendation: DP22**

4.3 Performance

4.3.1 Commentary on performance and attainment in each of the teams is shown in the sub-sections below:

Planning and Transport Policy

- 4.3.1.1 The team is primarily measuring performance through the meeting of a number of local project milestones. By their nature it is not generally possible to compare these with other local authorities or with past performance to generate trend analysis.
- 4.3.1.2 When complex factors affect the planned delivery of these milestones the service re-profile them to revised, more realistic deadlines.
- 4.3.1.3 Notwithstanding the general benchmarking observation above, PTP's progress in its production of the Local Plan has been benchmarked and is consistent with that of nearest neighbours (6 of the 16 authorities are at a more advanced stage), although progress is dependent on the availability of staffing resource and other competing priorities i.e. dealing with planning appeals.
- 4.3.1.4 Benchmarking progress for the production of a Minerals and Waste plan has been more difficult but suggests that 10 of the 16 comparator authorities are more advanced in this activity. It has not been possible to benchmark progress in producing a Local Transport Plan due to lack of available benchmarking data.
- 4.3.1.5 Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) collection rates are commendably high in the Council but it appears that the national increase in appeals against determinations is being reflected locally. Approval has recently been given to increase staffing levels to meet this increasing demand, funded from CIL administration fees.
- 4.3.1.6 The number of complaints made against the team is relatively small, between 5 and 7 for each of the last three years. Complaints against CIL demands appear to be rising although it is not yet certain whether this trend will continue.
- 4.3.1.7 The majority of the team's performance indicators are not reported corporately.

Comment

PTP's performance appears to be broadly in line with comparators, although progress against key activities, such as the production of the Local Plan, can sometimes be subject to delay if key staff are required for urgent activity elsewhere. **See Recommendation: DP10**

There does not appear to be much corporate visibility of the PTP performance against its core activities. **See Recommendation: DP11**

The Authority is making good use of its power to recover CIL.

Planning Services and Development Control

- 4.3.1.8 Historically, performance for the timeliness of determining planning applications exceeded the locally set targets for all three types of planning application. When compared to nearest neighbour authorities for 2015/16 and 2016/17, relative performance has, however, deteriorated from an already low base.
- 4.3.1.9 Following a change of rules from the government, local targets have been revised to be more in line with the national average and the team is working towards the achievement of them. There is, however, some way to go before this is attained. The service anticipates that by the end of Q4 2018/19 performance will be in line with the target.
- 4.3.1.10 Developers also report frustration that they are not kept fully informed on the progress of their applications. The service is of the view that this is primarily down to staff vacancies.
- 4.3.1.11 The proportion of upheld planning appeals is higher than the average for CIPFA group.
- 4.3.1.12 2016/17 saw a spike in complaints across all areas of the teams' activities but particularly in those made about delays in determination / service levels / communications (21 complaints made, a third of which were found to be justified). Numbers did, however, return to be more in line with previous years in 2017/18. High numbers of complaints are consistently received about the process through which applications are handled, and the Planning outcome or decision. Given the sometimes adversarial nature of this regulatory work this is unsurprising. Numbers of complaints about other aspects of the teams' activities are low.
- 4.3.1.13 The government has recently introduced a system that permits an increase of 20% to planning fees, on the basis that any additional money raised is directed towards improving performance. The bulk of this money will be used locally to bolster staffing numbers that will lead to improved customer service.
- 4.3.1.14 Although demand for Planning Enforcement is recorded, the length of time for which the team is involved in individual cases, and on average, cannot be determined. When compared with figures from other authorities, very few Planning Enforcement cases result in formal or legal action. It is current practice to encourage planning enforcement complaints to be resolved by asking for planning

applications to be submitted as it is the view of the service that this provides a more democratic and cost-effective solution. It is believed by the team that the serving of more enforcement notices would result in a sharp increase in appeals which would, in turn, put further pressure on the service.

Comment

The teams are not yet determining applications in line with the national average. The direction of travel is however upwards.

Improvements in the quality and timeliness of information provided to developers and customers should increase satisfaction with, and reduce complaints about, DC / PS. **See Recommendation: DP16**

The raising of planning appeals by applicants could be construed as being avoidable demand and therefore gaining an understanding of their causes may reduce their incidence, increasing the teams' capacity for core activity. Similarly, work to determine the reasons for planning appeals being upheld may allow the identification of underlying, systemic, common (and therefore avoidable) causes. **See Recommendation: DP20**

Measurement of the volume of Enforcement cases, length of Council involvement and outcome would assist with determining whether the management of them is or has been appropriate. **See Recommendation: DP15**

Housing

- 4.3.1.15 In 2017/18, at 76.9% (200 / 260) the percentage of people presenting as homeless, where the homelessness has been relieved or prevented, exceeded the target of 75%. This is similar to performance in 2016/17.
- 4.3.1.16 The timeliness of approvals for the high priority Disabled Facilities Grants at 99.1% in 2017/18 exceeded the annual targets and previous annual results.
- 4.3.1.17 The team and service management is of the view that the absence of measures for operational activity makes understanding local performance difficult. This is articulated in paragraph 4.2.1.9.
- 4.3.1.18 As part of the review, a conversation around 'data mining' or 'predictive analytics' has begun to identify how demand on the service might be reduced through earlier or different interventions. This emerging discipline could provide a catalyst for new and novel solutions to meet high demand activities.

Comment

There would appear to be scope for the use of 'predictive analytics' to meet or reduce demand in Housing. **See Recommendation: DP22**

The absence of activity measurement has resulted in the provision of only a partial picture of the team's performance. **See Recommendation: DP22**

5. Resources

5.1 Finance

5.1.1 Financial data, both revenue and capital, is shown in the sub-sections below.

Revenue

5.1.1.1 To give some financial context, a summary of the historical budgets for Development and Planning is shown in the table below:

Cost Centre Code	Cost Centre Name	Total Budget 2016/17 £	Actual Spend 2016/17 £	Budget Variance 2016/17 £	Total Budget 2017/18 £	Actual Spend 2017/18 £	Budget Variance 2017/18 £	Total Budget 2018/19 £
Development and planning revenue								
11100	Dev.Control & Enforcmt	224,780	(44,767)	(269,547)	198,340	152,593	(45,747)	177,350
VAR	Planning Policy	1,047,890	1,056,435	8,545	873,610	521,539	(352,071)	1,066,490
13804	Economic Development	0	0	0	63,970	62,209	(1,761)	69,320
VAR	Planning services and HOS	465,470	465,697	227	461,670	447,745	(13,925)	472,640
VAR	Housing	547,530	499,807	(47,723)	803,960	847,006	43,046	1,026,780
77015	Supporting people *	340,000	340,000	0	0	na	na	na
Total Revenue		2,625,670	2,317,172	(308,498)	2,401,550	2,031,092	(370,458)	2,812,580
Housing Capital Budgets for 2018/19								
	Savings		(112,000)			(40,000)		(219,500)
	Pressures		57,000			0		0
* Budget for Tw o Saints Hostel w as held in supporting people until 2016/17, w hen it w as moved to Temporary Accomodation								

5.1.1.2 A number of savings have been taken from the teams' budgets over the last few years. These relate mainly to staff reductions in Housing (£112k) as well as the removal of funding for the Minerals and Waste Plan (£160k). There were no reported pressures on the 2018/19 budget at the time of this report.

5.1.1.3 The requirements of the Homelessness Reduction Act have placed ongoing additional burdens on the Housing team. Grant funding received (£94k), will fund some of those additional costs during 2018/19. From 2019/20 those extra costs will be borne by the Council and become a pressure.

5.1.1.4 The planning fee increase of 20% has been included in the budget for 2018/19, along with an equal investment in new planning resources.

5.1.1.5 The team applies a fee for the provision of pre-planning advice. There is scope for this service to be co-ordinated with a similar scheme operating in Transport and Countryside and new pre-application charges to be introduced for Planning Policy.

Benchmarking

5.1.1.6 Financial benchmarking has been undertaken using the latest Revenue Outturn (RO) available which is for 2016/17, and also using detailed local authority level homelessness figures from the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG). It has not been possible to obtain more detailed information from individual authorities.

5.1.1.7 Comparisons have been made against other local authorities within the CIPFA defined nearest neighbour group (CIPFA) in total and also against two distinct sub-sets. The first subset is the other Berkshire Authorities (OBA), the second excludes authorities with their own housing stock (CIPFA xHRA).

5.1.1.8 The summary results of the benchmarking for development control and policy is contained in the table below:

Comparative group	West Berkshire Rank - Development Control and Policy							
	Net Expenditure	Total Expenditure	Ees Costs v Running Costs	Total Income	Fees and Charges	Other Income	Income v Expenditure	Employee cost per £1 income
	N°.	N°.	N°.	N°.	N°.	N°.	N°.	N°.
CIPFA group (16)	7	6	13	12	12	13	10	16
OBA (4)	3	3	4	3	3	4	2	4

5.1.1.9 The ranking shows that the Authority's performance in the CIPFA group is middle of the table for expenditure but ranked twelfth out of sixteen for income. In the OBA group WBC ranks third in most categories (Wokingham fourth).

5.1.1.10 Work is underway to understand what strategies other councils have in place to maximise income. The middle table ranking of the Authority, as far as net expenditure is concerned, would indicate that although there may be scope to increase income, the Council is not significantly off the pace. The Council's income of £1.5 million is average across the OBA group.

5.1.1.11 In terms of expenditure, work is currently ongoing to strip out overheads from running costs to gain a better understanding of direct service costs. That information is not yet available. Wokingham and this authority operate a pension deficit recovery model which inflates employee costs, and may explain their ranking in the OBA group.

5.1.1.12 Looking at the value of fee income in Development Control against the staff cost in processing this work, the Council ranks lowest in both comparator groups. There are a number of possible reasons for this apparent low productivity, including vacancy rates, mix of work and levies charged by other authorities for the submission of repeated invalid applications, not currently charged by WBC.

5.1.1.13 The summary results of the benchmarking for Housing are contained in the tables below:

Comparative group	West Berkshire Rank Housing						
	Net Expenditure	Total Expenditure	Ees Costs v Running Costs	Total Income	Fees and Charges	Other Income	Income v Expenditure
	N°.	N°.	N°.	N°.	N°.	N°.	N°.
CIPFA group (15)	8	5	10	11	8	10	11
CIPFA xHRA group (10)	8	5	6	6	4	5	8
OBA (4)	4	3	3	3	3	1	4

5.1.1.14 The ranking shows that WBC spend in the CIPFA xHRA group is in the bottom half for net expenditure and for total income. In the OBA group, performance is relatively low except in the area of other income (grants). In this group, it has the highest net costs, reflecting a relatively low recovery of costs from service users. These rankings are also reflected in the Income v Expenditure scores.

5.1.1.15 An analysis of figures from MHCLG relating to homelessness is shown in the table below. The cost per household is crudely calculated using the net cost of housing against the average number of temporary households. The Council is ranked 6th, and is average in the group.

	Numbers of households in council accommodation			
	Q ended March 16	Q ended March 17	Average	Net cost per Household
	N°.	N°.	N°.	£
Bath & North East Somerset UA	21	32	27	35
South Gloucestershire UA	91	68	80	13
North Somerset UA	47	58	53	15
Bracknell Forest UA	111	125	118	6
West Berkshire UA	50	53	52	23
Windsor & Maidenhead UA	0	0	0	0
Wokingham UA	55	49	52	13
Cheshire East UA	17	24	21	104
Herefordshire UA	34	41	38	38
Rutland UA	5	0	3	144
Average	43	45	44	22
West Berkshire Rank	7	7	6	6

5.1.1.16 It is difficult to draw conclusions from this basic data; further detailed work is required to look at the cost profile of Housing. The level of rent charged and maximising recovery also warrants further investigation.

5.1.1.17 The level of rents re-charged in 2018/19 has already been increased to the local housing allowance level for users in receipt of housing benefit, which will increase recovery going forward. Service users are means tested to ensure those who can pay are charged the full cost of temporary accommodation.

5.1.1.18 This analysis has revealed that there is a lot of potential for misclassification, particularly costs within the RO forms, and detailed benchmarking between types of costs is, therefore, compromised at this stage. For example - some councils (like West Berkshire) capitalise part or all of the administration of Disabled Facilities Grants and some may not treat these costs in the same way.

Comment

For planning and policy, the Council sits in the middle of the CIPFA nearest neighbour group of authorities across most benchmarking comparisons. Income from planning applications is average across the OBA. **See Recommendation: DP02**

Fee income vs staff costs in development control is comparatively low. **See Recommendation: DP02**

The Council's ranking against the CIPFA xHRA group indicates that, for Housing, net costs are high. **See Recommendations: DP02/DP22**

Opportunities to maximise income should be reviewed and resourced on a "spend to save" basis. This could include the introduction of tools to manage housing rental income. **See Recommendations: DP02/DP22/DP24**

A further review is required of the RO for 2017-18, alongside a review of the 2018-19 Revenue Account (RA) once both are published to compare more up to date results. **See Recommendations: DP05/DP06**

There is scope for the existing charge for pre-planning advice to be co-ordinated with a similar scheme operating in Transport and Countryside and new pre-application charges to be introduced for Planning Policy. **See Recommendation: DP19**

Capital

	2013/14 £	2014/15 £	2015/16 £	2016/17 £	2017/18 £	5 Year Average £
Tota Capital Spend	1,135,460	776,499	2,916,161	1,184,865	2,854,962	8,867,947
No of Schemes	4	5	8	8	8	0
Original Budget	1,455,500	1,468,500	1,623,500	2,089,500	4,752,650	-
Total spend as a % of original budget	78%	53%	180%	57%	60%	0%
Main reasons for year end variance	Underspend on DFGs	Underspend on DFGs	Additional S106 allocated for purchase of DYSOs	Underspends on DFGs and Four Houses Corner	£751k underspend on DFG reallocated to other schemes; Four Houses Corner delayed & part of temp accomodation budget re-profiled	

- 5.1.1.19 The Development and Planning capital programme mainly consists of Housing related schemes with a small amount of spend on transport planning policy, including the development of a new transport planning model on which £115k was spent in 2017/18.
- 5.1.1.20 In 2013/14 and 2014/15, the Housing programme mainly consisted of the Disabled Facilities Grants programme. From 2016/17 onwards, additional schemes have been added for the redevelopment of the Four Houses Corner Gypsy and Travellers' site (c. £1.5m) and the acquisition of new temporary accommodation (with a budget of £3m). Progress on the Four Houses Corner scheme has been hampered by difficulties with relocating some of the existing tenants.
- 5.1.1.21 Approximately £1.5m was spent on new temporary accommodation in 2017/18. To date 20 of the target 21 new units have either been bought or a formal offer has been made.
- 5.1.1.22 From time to time, when the opportunity arises, S106 funds are added to the programme during the course of the year e.g. to facilitate affordable housing schemes being promoted by Housing Associations or to buy back former shared ownership properties for use as temporary accommodation. This was the case in 2015/16.

Financial Challenge Review

- 5.1.1.23 For completeness, the following issues should be noted, having been raised as part of the Financial Challenge Review (FCR) for Development and Planning:
- Consider the effect of ceasing the publication of orange notices or press communication or letters to neighbours of properties subject to planning applications.
 - Consider the effect of providing planning applications to parish councils by electronic copy only.
 - Model the impact of reducing (a) by 1 FTE and (b) by 2 FTE the number of staff currently employed to deal with enforcement complaints.
 - By benchmarking fees with our nearest neighbour group, consider proposals for increased fee levels in the Housing team.
 - Consider quantified proposals for generating income from Economic Development activities, for example by securing

access to grant funding or by conducting seminars or conferences.

5.2 Staffing

5.2.1 Commentary on the human resource aspects of each of the teams is shown in the sub-sections below:

Planning & Transport Policy

- 5.2.1.1 Comparator authorities in the nearest neighbour group do not deliver exactly the same functions and activities and the operational scope of PTP in West Berkshire appears to be wider than most. In part, this can be attributed to the rural nature of the district.
- 5.2.1.2 Organisational structures, job descriptions and salaries for those working in the team appear to be broadly in line with those in place in other authorities where data have been able to be obtained (four authorities). The structure is quite stratified, particularly in the Planning Policy team, but again this appears to be comparable to other local authorities.
- 5.2.1.3 At July 2018 the team had an establishment of 18.72 FTE, of which 4 FTE were vacant full posts and a further 1.71 FTE hours within filled posts but where the incumbents were part time. This equates to a vacancy rate of 25.4% which compares to 29% for the entire service and 18% across the whole Council (comparator figures as at March 2018).
- 5.2.1.4 Historically, vacancy rates have been higher which has had an operational impact on keeping Local Plan preparations to timetable and on the team's responsiveness to both planning applications and CIL requests. This deficit in operational capacity is expected to be resolved when a significant number of the vacancies that have been recently offered are taken up over the summer.
- 5.2.1.5 2017/18 sickness rates within the team averaged 2.4 days per FTE. This compares very favourably to cross-Council absence of 8.59 days per employee. Annual appraisal completion rates are at 83%. It should be noted that the appraisal report looks at current post holding only, so it could be that a member of staff had an appraisal in their previous post and this wouldn't show, they would need objective setting in their new role.

Development Control & Planning Services

- 5.2.1.6 From data supplied, comparator authorities in the nearest neighbour group do not appear to have a separate team dedicated to the receipt, validation and registration of planning applications, having 'technical officers' embedded within teams instead.
- 5.2.1.7 The staffing structure in place for qualified planners is highly stratified in comparison to other disciplines within the Authority, and somewhat more so than nearest neighbour norms. Management's

view is that experience / seniority (and therefore competence) is the key determinant for the allocation of applications to case officers, with more junior staff handling straightforward applications and more senior officers larger and more complex cases, and this makes a necessity for a multi-tiered structure. The management team has, though, looked to reduce the number of tiers in recent years but overlapping grades and personnel issues have prevented action in this area.

- 5.2.1.8 This type of structure can hinder career progression for staff as tiers are overlapping. Job descriptions and salaries appear to be broadly comparable with those in nearest neighbour authorities.
- 5.2.1.9 A sub team has recently been created in DC to deal exclusively with 'commercial' applications (i.e. for premises from which businesses can operate) in line with the service's economic growth remit.
- 5.2.1.10 Caseload, where it has been possible to compare it, appears to be generally higher in the teams than in other authorities.
- 5.2.1.11 At July 2018 the teams had an establishment of 48.38 FTE, of which 11.61 FTE posts were vacant. While this gave an overall vacancy rate of 27.1%, it conceals that in the Eastern Area team there was a 39% vacancy rate, in Enforcement 70% and, for those posts not currently allocated to a second team, 45%. As the whole Council average at the same point was 18% this would appear to be a cause for concern. The situation could be slightly ameliorated by the deletion of the fractions of posts that remain for members of staff working part time hours, but it is recognised that the teams may have valid reasons for retaining the establishment at existing levels.
- 5.2.1.12 There is a Planning Officer post which has been vacant since October 2017, and an Enforcement Officer post which has been vacant since January 2018. All posts are, however, now being advertised in the national planning press. The Enforcement post was held vacant as it is part of the Financial Challenge discussions and is likely to be cut.
- 5.2.1.13 2017/18 sickness rates within the team averaged 5.25 days per FTE. This is below the cross-Council average of 8.59 days per employee. Annual appraisal completion rates are at 82%. It should be noted that the appraisal report looks at current post holding only, so it could be that a member of staff had an appraisal in their previous post and this wouldn't show, they would need objective setting in their new role.

Housing

- 5.2.1.14 At July 2018 the team had an establishment of 23.68 FTE, of which 2.5 FTE posts were vacant. This gave an overall vacancy rate of 10.5% compared to the whole Council average at the same point of 18%.
- 5.2.1.15 Sickness rates within the team, for 2017/18, averaged 9.3 days per FTE. This is above the cross-Council average of 8.59 days per employee. Annual appraisal completions have risen steadily over the last three years and for 2017/18 stand at 94%.
- 5.2.1.16 A post of Strategy & Review Team Leader has been created to provide additional focus and resource for housing development/enabling as well as for the conduct of reviews under the requirements of the Homelessness Reduction Act.
- 5.2.1.17 As there is no administrative support in the team; all basic functions are carried out by relatively expensive Housing Officers. As comparator data has been difficult to obtain, the extent to which activities are segmented in other local authorities is unable to be determined.
- 5.2.1.18 Staff report that they would like more cohesion and joined up working across the team, which they characterise as 'multi-skilling'. This would, however, appear to run counter to the workforce and work/caseload models being considered as part of the review.
- 5.2.1.19 Salaries for the team appear comparable to other housing authorities, although team structures have not been made available for comparison.

Comment

Work could be undertaken across the service to improve the percentage of annual appraisal completions. **See Recommendation: DP04**

Consideration should be given to the deletion from the establishment of those proportions of full time posts not taken up by part time workers **See Recommendation: DP08**

The separation of registration and validation activities – between PS and DC – from the determination of planning applications, supported by web based self-service IT systems, has been in operation in West Berkshire for many years. This is very much in line with the aim of New Ways of Working and the Council appears to be ahead of the pack.

The allocation of planning cases based on complexity is a sound principle but it is not clear whether the highly tiered organisational structure is providing a match with the case mix being handled by DC. A flatter but broader formation – with appropriately remunerated staff – may help to address the ongoing

and chronic vacancy rate. As part of this investigation, caseloads should be reviewed. **See Recommendation: DP14**

The use of Housing Officers for non-technical activity appears to offer an opportunity for the separation of tasks that might be carried out by generalist or administrative roles, supported by digital technology, and those that genuinely require a higher level of subject matter expertise. **See Recommendation: DP22**

Team leader capacity in Housing would appear to need to be improved to release the team manager from their involvement in ordinary day to day operational matters. **See Recommendation: DP22**

Sickness rates in Housing are higher than the cross-Council average and should be investigated to determine whether there are any underlying causes. **See Recommendation: DP23**

5.3 Information and Communication

5.3.1 An assessment of the service's use of ICT, including the extent to which it currently aligns with the workload distribution model shown at paragraph 2.3, is shown in the following sub-sections:

5.3.1.1 The service spends approximately £105k per annum on the eight essential or business critical ICT systems shown in the table below:

System	Use
Idox Uniform	DC / PS case management and policy monitoring
OpenText Marvin	DC / PS document and records management
Locata	CHR and homelessness case management
Autocad	Housing adaptations technical drawings
EXACOM Obligation Suite	CIL administration
Objective Keystone Ltd	PTP consultation
Costar	Economic Development commercial property analysis

5.3.1.2 Officers in Housing also have access to data in another three systems, administered and 'owned' by other services within the Council, to support their case management and decision-making. These are shown below:

System	Use
Civica Flare	Housing grants administration
Care Director	ASC-funded grants administration
Northgate	Housing grants eligibility

5.3.1.3 Feedback from staff within the service indicates that there could be scope to make further and better use of IT, including the Uniform system, to reduce duplication and rekeying in DC/PS.

5.3.1.4 Officers in Housing report that improvements could be made in the management of rent accounts, a process that is currently ad-hoc and cumbersome and presents a financial risk to the Council. Testing of the CHR public interface to the Locata system suggests that it has failed to keep pace with changes to modern communications devices.

5.3.1.5 Given the small size of the team, the nature of its activities and that, outside of large scale consultation (for example on the Local Plan, for which the Keystone system is used), PTP has a low level of communication with the public, the existing web/telephone arrangements appear to be fit for purpose. Productivity could however be improved if the team were to be provided with direct access to information held elsewhere within the Authority and existing hard copy records were to be made digital.

- 5.3.1.6 DC/PS currently make significant use of digital and self-serve communications channels for submitted planning applications, although arrangements for telephone calls to be directed through the Contact Centre appear to be working less well. This appears to be because Contact Centre officers do not have access to the information that callers seek.
- 5.3.1.7 When consulted as part of this review, developers advised that they would prefer to have direct access to case officers in DC. To provide this, access would require a deviation from the workload distribution model postulated in the NWOW review process.
- 5.3.1.8 The receipt of some planning and other applications by DC/PS requires data to be rekeyed.
- 5.3.1.9 PS scans to digital format, documentation received on paper. As this practice also takes place elsewhere in the Authority there may be scope for the activities to be joined up.
- 5.3.1.10 Housing processes generate a substantial number of interactions with clients, most of which are via the telephone or face to face and a proportion of which is for progress chasing, whether justified or not. Website usage is well below Council averages. This would indicate that there is scope to consider the introduction of the model articulated at paragraph 2.3.
- 5.3.1.11 It has not been possible to benchmark the Council's performance in this area against that of other authorities.

Comment

The digitisation of historic records and the provision of access to ICT systems in other services should be considered for PTP. **See Recommendations: DP12/DP21**

There appears to be a significant amount of duplication and rekeying of data in DC / PS which could be ameliorated by process improvement or better use of ICT. **See Recommendations: DP09/DP17**

Although DC / PS makes considerable use of digital services and the Contact Centre to allow trained planners to focus on case management, there would appear to be the opportunity for further improvements. **See Recommendation: DP01**

As the NWOW reviews progress there may be scope to integrate scanning functions across teams. **See Recommendation: DP07**

There would appear to be significant scope to shift more Housing contact to digital channels, including the provision of proactive communications and self-service tools, and to explore how the Contact Centre might help introduce a three-tier delivery model. **See Recommendation: DP01/DP22**

The Home Choice West Berkshire portal is somewhat dated and the opportunity should be taken for it to be improved or replaced. **See Recommendation: DP25**

The process for management of rental income, including exploring where digital services might reduce workload, reduce risk and increase income, would suggest that there would be a benefit to it being redesigned. **See Recommendation: DP24**

5.4 Stakeholder feedback

- 5.4.1 In addition to the feedback that has informed and been reflected elsewhere in this report, it should be noted that a number of comments received from the 208 Housing clients who provided their opinions for the review, expressed dissatisfaction with the responsiveness of the team and the manner in which their communications were sometimes handled.
- 5.4.2 The Housing survey also suggested that there was a strong preference for the traditional methods of communication and little appetite for new technologies, despite the majority of respondents being aged between 25 and 44.
- 5.4.3 Staff in all the teams contributed a number of suggestions that have been outside of the scope of this review but were, nonetheless, recorded. They may provide the prospect for service improvement or development opportunities to which consideration should be given, along with feedback to the contributing members of staff.

Comment

Client dissatisfaction with the Housing team indicates that there may be scope for an examination of the customer service practices within the team.
See Recommendation: DP22

The list of suggestions from staff should be examined by service management and feedback given on the viability of action being taken on them.
See Recommendation: DP03

5.5 Alternative models of service delivery

- 5.5.1 The service's activities are currently, in the main, provided by directly employed staff. There do not appear to be any significant problems that are either caused, or exacerbated, by this delivery model.
- 5.5.2 Notwithstanding paragraph 5.5.1, various parts of the service have been delivered through shared agreements in the past, though not all were successful. The service has on-going dialogue for sharing with other authorities but there currently appears to be little appetite among the other Berkshire unitaries for specific initiatives to be pursued.
- 5.5.3 The management team believes that it lacks the commercial acumen to establish an external trading model. The market for Development Control / Planning Services is thought to be somewhat immature and the number of commercial providers is small.
- 5.5.4 The Minerals and Waste function was shared across Berkshire following the 1998 Local Government reorganisation but has since been disaggregated. The other Berkshire authorities are now joining together in this area of activity and it is intended that West Berkshire will consider joining this shared service when the Minerals and Waste plan has been completed in approximately 18 months' time.
- 5.5.5 The possibility of transferring Economic Development to the Local Enterprise Partnership has previously been examined and rejected by the Chief Executive and former Leader of the Council. The activities of the Newbury Business Improvement District are considered to be too narrowly focused to address the wider ED agenda, although a broader Community Interest Company, covering all of West Berkshire, is being considered.
- 5.5.6 Following the introduction of an improved digital channel for Housing Operations (the requirement for which is highlighted at sub section 5.3), residual telephone calls could be handled by the Contact Centre. The service would support an investigation into the viability of this transfer of responsibility and the move would be in line with the aspirations of NWOW. Incoming postal items, currently scanned locally, could be handled elsewhere within the Authority.
- 5.5.7 The Home Improvement Agency could be delivered through a Local Authority Trading Company or social enterprise but it should be borne in mind that this function has had an income generation target allocated through the FCR process.
- 5.5.8 There is an absence of clarity on which team within the service calculates the value of CIL contributions and the responsibility is split between DC and PTP.
- 5.5.9 The Housing team would very much support outsourcing the management of the gypsy and traveller site, and Housing Operations could potentially be outsourced to Sovereign Housing Association.

Comment

There appears to be little merit in fundamentally changing the way in which any of the service's activities are delivered.

The absence of clarity on the responsibility for CIL calculations creates uncertainty. **See Recommendation: DP13**

There may be opportunities to review team responsibilities for service delivery and to consider whether some services (e.g. Economic Development) might be delivered elsewhere within the Council. However, these opportunities will be limited in both scope and financial benefit.

It may be appropriate to consider outsourcing Housing Operations and the management of the gypsy and traveller site.

The transfer of responsibility for the handling of telephone calls in Housing, in line with the NWOW workload distribution model, should be strongly considered. **See Recommendation: DP01**

6. Conclusions

6.1 Strategic alignment

- 6.1.1 The Council has had statutory duties to deliver the service's core activities, broadly 'Planning' and 'Housing', for many years and while this is obvious, it is also obvious that the very nature of them, simultaneously both essential and contentious, will always generate both national and local initiatives to shape the local place or places. The Local Plan and some Housing policies and strategies require action to update them, which should be carried out in the near term.
- 6.1.2 In some respects then, change is almost business as usual, as statutory direction flows from Whitehall, and each team within the service has, over the years, absorbed and adjusted to policy shifts. It should, however, be noted that some of the work required, for example, to deal with the recent changes contained within the National Planning Policy Framework, has been, is and will be, significant.
- 6.1.3 The service has responded positively to the local objective to generate development and growth but there is still work to do, for example the making of necessary facilitative arrangements in the Local Plan. It should be borne in mind that with the exception of PTP, many, if not most, of the activities and transactions carried out by the service, for example dealing with planning and CHR applications, do not align with the 'development and growth' objective.
- 6.1.4 The service's management team has had an open mind to its delivery models and, in the past, has made use of external organisations when it has been expedient to do so. There are no compelling reasons for the Authority to make large-scale changes to the current, predominantly in-house, arrangements. There also appears to be little benefit in moving the Economic Development function (which has only formed part of PTP since 2017) to any other part of the Authority.
- 6.1.5 The service should, however, address the absence of clarity on responsibility for CIL calculations, and decide which of PTP or DC carries out the function, which will provide lucidity for staff in the service and, therefore, ease operational delivery.
- 6.1.6 Although outsourcing would undoubtedly be supported by staff, previous experience indicates that the identification of an outside organisation to manage the gypsy and traveller site would be extremely difficult. For this reason it should not be pursued.
- 6.1.7 Housing Operations should remain within the Authority as it offers the potential for generating income.

6.2 Efficiency and effectiveness

- 6.2.1 Despite all the teams being aligned to the achievement of the same, broad, strategic aims, as articulated in paragraph 6.1.3, elements of the service work to the achievement of other outcomes and this consequently creates the necessity to comment on efficiency and effectiveness at team level.

Planning and Transport Policy

- 6.2.2 The assessment of relative performance against that of nearest neighbour authorities is problematic given the extensive use of very local indicators within PTP. For milestones relating to the Local Plan and Minerals and Waste Plan, West Berkshire is, however, broadly in line with the comparator group. More corporate visibility could be given to the team's performance.
- 6.2.3 The team's financial performance is middling when compared to the benchmarking group's 2016/17 figures (the most recent available), although there would appear to be the opportunity to raise income levels so that they are more in line with the group's norms, particularly for Transport Policy but also more generally across the team's activities. Further examination of more up to date data will confirm if this remains the case.
- 6.2.4 The requirement to deal with planning appeals and Neighbourhood Development Plans diverts staffing resource from core activity but this could be mitigated by filling the team's unoccupied posts (if they are not deleted from the establishment). In addition to providing resilience to processes such as the production of the Local Plan, this action may also provide capacity for the generation of income, as set out in the preceding paragraph.
- 6.2.5 There do not appear to be any fundamental staffing problems although work should be undertaken to increase the percentage of annual appraisals that are completed.

Development Control and Planning Services

- 6.2.6 The revision of time targets for the handling of applications has caused a drop in performance but the team is on track to meet the required level. This will bring it into line with comparators.
- 6.2.7 Failure demand for invalid planning applications is significant, as around 60% of submitted planning applications are judged to be invalid, necessitating the additional processing when they are re-submitted. There would seem then to be scope to investigate the causes and, perhaps, introduce an application validation service as part of the provision of non-statutory pre-planning advice. This could both reduce the number of invalid planning applications, and generate additional income. There is also scope to offer more online self-service as part of the existing elements of the pre-planning advice service, to reduce administration.
- 6.2.8 Many planning applications are submitted via the Planning Portal, a joint venture between Government and a private company, Terraquest. In addition

to introducing a validation service, it may also be prudent to investigate whether the number of invalid applications received via the Planning Portal could be reduced.

- 6.2.9 The rekeying of data from one system to another appears to be an inefficient feature of work processes in some of the team's activities. This could be addressed by more use of core systems and connectors between them.
- 6.2.10 The raising of planning appeals by applicants could be construed as being avoidable demand and, therefore, gaining an understanding of their causes may reduce their incidence, increasing the teams' capacity for core activity. Similarly, work to determine the reasons for planning appeals being upheld may allow the identification of underlying, systemic, common, and therefore avoidable, causes.
- 6.2.11 Data are neither collected nor reported on the length of Council involvement or outcomes for Enforcement cases, nor is recourse to the courts routinely considered. A deeper understanding of the Council's performance, including relative to that in other Local Planning Authorities, would inform debate on whether the management of them is, or has been, appropriate.
- 6.2.12 The team's financial performance is middling when compared to the benchmarking group's 2016/17 figures (the most recent available), although there would appear to be the opportunity to raise income levels so that they are more in line with the group's norms. Further examination of more up to date data will confirm if this remains the case.
- 6.2.13 The allocation of planning cases to officers based on the complexity of the former and the experience of the latter is a sound principle but the highly tiered organisational structure warrants in-depth investigation. A flatter but broader formation – with appropriately remunerated staff – may help to address the ongoing and chronic vacancy rate. As part of this investigation, caseloads might also be reviewed. This might help to improve customer satisfaction and reduce numbers of complaints.
- 6.2.14 The percentage of annual appraisals completed is low and needs to be improved.

Housing

- 6.2.15 Although limited, the demand and performance data available shows that demand has reduced and performance has improved and is above targets. Feedback from staff in the team, however, suggests that this gives only a partial picture of the reality of the service because demand is not being measured in a meaningful fashion. There would appear, therefore, to be scope for developing and reporting on more measures of performance and volume.
- 6.2.16 The impact of the new duties imposed by the Homelessness Reduction Act will need to be kept under review to ensure that the team continues to be able to meet demand.

- 6.2.17 Although its cause may be rooted in the absence of sufficient affordable housing within the District, which is obviously beyond its control, the extent to which the team is seen to be sufficiently customer-focussed warrants examination. This could form part of a wider assessment of culture and effectiveness.
- 6.2.18 The introduction of 'predictive analytics' tools into the Authority present the opportunity to identify novel responses to high demand activities, such as those in Housing. This line of investigation should be pursued.
- 6.2.19 The team's financial expenditure is high when compared to the benchmarking group's 2016/17 figures (the most recent available) and net costs are also high. There would appear to be the opportunity to raise income levels so that they are more in line with the group's norms. Further examination of more up to date data will confirm if this remains the case.
- 6.2.20 The process for management of rental income, including exploring where digital services might reduce workload and increase income, would suggest that there would be a benefit to it being redesigned.

6.3 Three tier workload distribution

6.3.1 As with the comment on efficiency and effectiveness, there is considerable variation between the teams in the extent to which the three tier workload distribution model is being operated. Comment on each team individually therefore is set out in the sub sections following.

Planning and Transport Policy

6.3.2 The size of the staffing establishment, the nature and manner in which activities are conducted (i.e. very small numbers of subject matter experts, working on specialised projects) and, with the exception of the large scale public consultations, the low volumes of public transactions do not lend themselves to the adoption of the three tier workload distribution model.

6.3.3 As indicated elsewhere in the report however there are peripheral changes to the key elements of the model (i.e. staffing and the use of information and communications) that may improve productivity.

Development Control and Planning Services

6.3.4 The separation of the administration of registration and validation activities from the technical determination of planning applications has been in operation in West Berkshire for many years. This is very much in line with the aim of New Ways of Working and the team appears to be ahead of many of its contemporaries elsewhere within local government. It is probably also one of the most advanced examples of the application of the model within the Authority.

6.3.5 Notwithstanding the team's relative position, in addition to the uses of technology for digitisation set out in section 6.2, there would also appear to be scope for the team's relationship with the Contact Centre to be examined in order to identify where more and better case and other information can be provided by officers there, rather than calls needing to be transferred to officers in DC/PS.

Housing

6.3.6 Of the teams in Development and Planning, Housing offers the most opportunities for significant business and efficiency improvement through the adoption of the three tier workload distribution model.

6.3.7 First and foremost, work will need to be undertaken to understand and map the processes involved, followed by analysis to determine how they might be made more effective and efficient.

6.3.8 Understanding of the roles and skills required to administer new processes will also be necessary and this will involve significant cultural and organisational change within the team.

6.3.9 In addition to updating existing ICT systems, there would appear to be considerable scope for the introduction of new digital technologies for

proactive communications (for example the provision of regular, unprompted, updates for CHR applicants) along with a drive to encourage a shift to digital channels (web and mobile) for self-service. Use of the Contact Centre for residual telephone calls will further support the introduction of the three-tier workload distribution model.

6.4 Summary

- 6.4.1 Overall, as might be expected for an examination of a service with a span of sometimes unconnected activities through a review with such a broad remit, condensing a judgment on its strategy and operation in a succinct fashion is difficult.
- 6.4.2 It is, however, clear that there are a number of improvement actions that could be taken that should, if implemented properly, simultaneously enhance the service's contribution to the Authority's strategic objectives, improve the customer experience and, through the removal of operational impediments, have a positive effect for those working in the service.
- 6.4.3 The scale of the work required would indicate that outside expertise and assistance will be required to ensure that the required outcomes are achieved.

7. Future action

7.1.1 From the matters identified within this document and its supporting data, improvement proposals and other items for consideration are shown in the table below.

7.1.2 If agreed, progress against the achievement of them will be monitored through the Programme Office.

Item	Action	Expected benefit and impact	Lead	Impact / priority
	Whole Service			
DP01	Analysis should be carried out to identify changes to the handling of telephone calls to the service (excluding Planning and Transport Policy) in order to decrease where possible the number of calls that must be handled by case officers	Improved cost effectiveness	Programme Office	High / High
DP02	Work should be undertaken to identify how income levels across the service might be raised to be more in line with other authorities in the comparator group. Specific lines of enquiry should cover <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retention of planning fees for invalid applications • Pre-application advice • Grants • Rents (to include recovery) 	Increased income	Service Finance Manager	High / Medium
DP03	A response should be provided to staff on their suggestions put forward at the SWOT workshops	Staff communication	Head of Development and Planning	High / Medium
DP04	Annual staff appraisal rates should be improved to be in line with cross-Council norms.	Improved staff management	Head of Development and Planning /All managers	Medium / High
DP05	The results of the work in train to fully understand direct service costs should be reported to Operations Board.	Improved cost effectiveness	Service Finance Manager	Medium / Medium
DP06	A further review of the RO for 2017/18 and RA for 2018/19 should be undertaken to obtain an up to date picture of the service's comparative financial performance.	Improved cost effectiveness	Service Finance Manager	Medium / Medium

Item	Action	Expected benefit and impact	Lead	Impact / priority
DP07	As the NWOV reviews progress, assess the need for and desirability of merging scanning functions across teams and services.	Reduced cost / greater efficiency	Programme Office	Low / Medium
DP08	Consideration should be given to the deletion from the establishment of parts of posts not occupied.	Improved management information	Head of Development and Planning	Low / Low
	Planning and Transport Policy Team			
DP09	In order to reduce duplication and the need for rekeying of data, measures should be adopted to exploit the capability of existing electronic systems, these might include <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A review of the use of the Planning Portal • The use of tablets • Integration between internal systems Allowing consultees to enter responses directly into Uniform.	Improved efficiency	Digital Team (through the Programme Office)	High / High
DP10	The appropriate staffing resources should be put into place to ensure that there is sufficient capacity in PTP to both deal with appeals and NDPs and for the completion of essential activity such as the Local Plan and the securing of grants to support Transport Policy. Higher priority should then be given to the completion of the Local Plan.	Service resilience / attainment of strategic goals	Head of Development and Planning / Planning & Transport Policy Manager	High / Medium
DP11	Consideration should be given to the level to which performance and progress against targets, including for the completion of projects in PTP (eg the production of the Local Plan) is reported.	Transparency / scrutiny	Head of Development and Planning / Planning & Transport Policy Manager	Low / Medium
DP12	A cost / benefit analysis should be undertaken to assess the desirability of digitising existing hard copy records in Planning and Transport Policy.	Improved efficiency	Programme Office	Low / Medium
DP13	Clarity should be given on which team has responsibility for the	Improved efficiency /	Head of Development	Low / Low

Item	Action	Expected benefit and impact	Lead	Impact / priority
	Development Control and Planning Services			
DP14	<p>In-depth workforce analysis and planning should be carried out across Development Control (and to a lesser extent Planning Services) to ensure that</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The teams do not operate in an unduly hierarchical structure • Job descriptions reflect any adjustments to roles required as a result of changed structures • Caseloads (number and complexity) are appropriate <p>Due to the very stratified nature of its existing structure, this work should begin in Development Control</p>	Improved cost effectiveness	Head of Human Resources (through the Programme Office)	High / High
DP15	A robust performance management framework, including the capture of appropriate measures of volume, should be put into place for Planning Enforcement. The data collected should be used to inform debate, at a senior level, on the best extent to which the Council's limited resources can be put.	Improved efficiency	Head of Development and Planning / Development Control Manager	High / Medium
DP16	Mechanisms should be identified and introduced to ensure planning applicants, their agents and developers are satisfactorily informed about the handling of their cases. This might include the allocation of time for scheduled meeting with case officers.	Improved customer satisfaction	Head of Development and Planning	Medium / Medium
DP17	Measures should be identified and introduced to digitise the pre-application process and introduce a validation service as part of it.	Improved efficiency Income generation	Digital Team (through the Programme Office)	Medium / Medium

Item	Action	Expected benefit and impact	Lead	Impact / priority
DP18	Steps should be identified and introduced to reduce the number of invalid applications and digitise as far as possible the application and validation process	Improved efficiency Reduced failure demand	Digital Team (through the Programme Office)	Medium / Medium
DP19	Discussions should be undertaken with officers in the Transport and Countryside service to ensure that the purpose and operation of each of their respective pre-planning advice services operate in an appropriately integrated manner.	Public clarity / avoidance of duplication	Head of Development and Planning / Development Control Manager	Low / Low
DP20	A review should be undertaken to identify common causes for Planning Appeals 1. Being made and 2. Being successful and measures, including staff awareness and training, taken to reduce their incidence.	Improved efficiency Reduced failure demand	Head of Development and Planning / Development Control Manager	Low / Low
DP21	Where appropriate, access to ICT systems in use in other parts of the Authority should be provided to the CIL team.	Improved efficiency	Programme Office	Low / Low
	Housing			
DP22	A review of the Housing team by the Chartered Institute for Housing should be commissioned to determine the extent to which the team's operation is in line with best practice. The review should make recommendations for improvement, on (in particular): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The strategy and policy framework; • The measurement and management of demand; • Financial expenditure and income; • Process improvement (including adoption of the 'three tier' workload distribution model); • Staffing establishment levels, structures and roles; • Customer focus and culture 	Improved efficiency / effectiveness	Housing Manager	High / High

Item	Action	Expected benefit and impact	Lead	Impact / priority
DP23	Active measures should be taken in Housing to reduce sickness levels to be more in line with (or below) cross-Council norms.	Improved staff management	Head of Development and Planning / Housing Manager	Medium / Medium
DP24	Measures should be identified and implemented to more effectively manage rental income.	Improved efficiency / effectiveness / income	Housing Manager / Digital Team	Medium / Medium
DP25	An assessment should be undertaken to determine whether the Home Choice West Berkshire portal should be improved or replaced.	Channel shift (through technical compatibility) / reduced workload	Digital Team (through the Programme Office)	Medium / Low