



Item

ANNUAL REPORT OF Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service 2019/20

To:

Councillor Katie Thornburrow, Executive Councillor for Planning Policy and Open Spaces

Planning & Transport Scrutiny Committee 30th June 2020

Report by:

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Wards affected:

All

Not a Key Decision

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report summarises the outputs of the Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service (GCSPS) during 2019/20.
- 1.2 The principle of producing a single annual report for both the 3Cs and Greater Cambridge (2Cs) shared services was agreed at committee in July 2015.
- 1.3 Greater Cambridge Shared Services Annual Report covers the Waste, Planning and Internal Audit services, and is submitted to the South Cambridgeshire District Council Committee for scrutiny, but at the City Council only the Planning Shared Service falls under this Committee's remit and therefore the service report has been extracted and is included below.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 The Executive Councillor is recommended to note the content of the report.

3. Background

- 3.1 In July 2015, Cambridge City, Huntingdonshire District and South Cambridgeshire District Councils each approved a model for sharing Legal, Building Control and ICT services. The three services went live within 3C Shared Services in October 2015 with a commitment to provide an Annual report.
- 3.2 The business case for a Shared Planning Service between Cambridge City Council and South Cambridgeshire District Council was approved by both Councils in 2017. The service went live in December 2017.
- 3.3 The overarching Shared Service performance is monitored through the Greater Cambridge Shared Services Management Board (containing the lead directors from each authority), Greater Cambridge Chief Executives' Board and 2C Joint Advisory Group (comprising of the leaders of each of the Councils). The Shared Planning Service also has a member led steering group and reports monthly to the two Chief Executives.
- 3.4 The service business plans for the Shared Building Control and Planning services were approved by the City, Huntingdonshire District and South Cambridgeshire District Councils' committees in March 2019
- 3.5 The business plans contain the priorities, key performance indicators and budgetary profiles for 2019/20.

4. Planning Shared Service Annual Report 2019/20

- 4.1 The Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service went live in April 2018 with the following objectives:
 - To create and deliver an effective programme for the creation of a single, unified "Greater Cambridge" planning capability serving the Planning Committees of each of the participating Councils.
 - To build a shared capacity and capability within the combined teams (and provide opportunities to support others) in a way that seizes opportunities for greater efficiency and improvements to the quality of service and subsequent development across the area by providing services and products (including additional charged services) that meet the needs of users and the community at the lowest net cost.
 - To deliver a service that can be flexible - in deployment and delivery.
 - To build/retain a reputation for professionalism, staff development, the delivery of high-quality outcomes and competent "business management" amongst peers and partners.
- 4.2 The Service is the "Local Planning Authority" for the areas of South Cambridgeshire District Council and Cambridge City Council. It therefore has a number of statutory roles to perform on behalf of the two Councils and, in addition, undertakes a number of "discretionary" activities that complement the delivery of corporate and strategic planning objectives.

- 4.3 The service can charge fees, which are set nationally for planning and related applications and for land charge searches. It also levies a range of discretionary charges for pre-application advice.
- 4.4 Through 2019/20 the service continued to implement the comprehensive service wide re-structure involving all staff, building on the consultation and engagement programme in 2018/19. The impacts of that re-structure on service capacity, particularly in the delivery team where staff turnover resulted in key posts becoming vacant, were significant, with a corresponding impact upon the service performance and customer feedback. That programme of work culminated in Q4 with the implementation of the ICT platform and the consolidation into a single team of the separate technical support teams and has enabled the establishment and operation, from Q1 2020/21 of three area teams in delivery.
- 4.5 The integration of the consultancy teams of both Councils into the Built and Natural Environment Team and creation of a single policy and strategy capability meanwhile saw the successful delivery of the “First Consultation” on the Joint Local Plan, adoption of the Sustainable Design and Construction SPD and progression of work on the North East Cambridge Area Action Plan.

Financial Performance

- 4.6 The financial position for 2019/20 is recorded in the table below:

Shared Planning Service (£'000s)			
	Annual Budget	Actual *	Variance *
Total	5,205	4,971	234

*Actual and variance figures are provisional as Finance still working to finalise accounts.

The Service had full year under-spend of £234k. This is largely due to better than budgeted income from applications within SCD. There was considerable under-spend on core staffing, although this was largely offset by spend on agency workers and contractors to supplement service capacity.

Service Performance

- 4.7 The service monitors a number of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) through the year. The ones, for which the Service has targets are:
- Decision making within statutory or agreed timelines for Major applications
 - Decision making within statutory or agreed timelines – Minor applications
 - Decision making within statutory or agreed timelines – Other applications

4.8 Performance on Major applications was above target (69% against a 60% target), but just fell short on Minor applications (64% against a 65% target) and missed the target for Other applications (72% against and 80% target). The consequences of the service re-structure including the impact on staff turnover and recruitment, the impacts of the process design, implementation and training programme for ICT on officer capacity and a buoyant development environment meant that through 2019/20 the delivery team have faced a number of challenges. Implementation of a contract with Terraquest for additional targeted support on applications was also delayed for technical reasons. Throughput, as well as performance suffered accordingly despite the considerable commitment of staff, and complaints centred upon delays accordingly increased.

4.9 With the appointment of additional permanent delivery managers for Strategic Sites and Development Management in Q2, the implementation of the ICT solution in Q4 and the successful recruitment of senior officers through Q3 and Q4 to support managers in performance management in the service, throughput of the service has risen significantly in Q4 (see below) even allowing for the impacts from the loss of ICT capabilities for SCDC during the ICT transition in February 2020. The number of applications determined each month in Q4 exceeds the number of new (and historic) applications so that the existing backlog of cases, is now falling. Performance of the newly configured and restructured technical support team is also now improving, as familiarity with the Idox solution increases, although the impacts of Covid and the evacuation of the newly formed joint team from the Guildhall in March and April has impacted process efficiencies and the capacities of staff. Additional resources and support from ICT to secure improved capacity will improve outputs through Q1 of 2020/21.

Applications Decided



4.10 Despite these challenges, the outputs from the service have been received positively. The Local Plan consultation reached over 300,000 people online and culminated in a well-attended event in the Corn Exchange. The work on Village Design Statements which concluded in 2019 was positively received by the

respective Parishes and has helped in the shaping and determination of applications. The Sustainable Design and Construction SPD was also widely supported and forms an important part of cementing both Councils commitment to addressing climate change – one of four key themes in the consultation on the Joint Local Plan.

- 4.11 Planning Magazine, the trade publication for the planning profession meanwhile published a league table suggesting that the Greater Cambridge Planning Service had issued the largest planning permissions of 2019, with both Waterbeach and the Wellcome campus extension accounting for the lions share. The service also successfully defended the Councils decision, supported by Parish Councils locally, to refuse planning permission for a major Agri tech development in the South of the District. Meanwhile, the Royal Town Planning Institute awarded Marmalade Lane its overall award (the Silver Jubilee Cup) for planning achievement , alongside awards for wellbeing and small scheme in a “virtual” ceremony in March 2020, Congratulating the developers TOWN and the Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service, RTPI President Sue Mann commented “The development highlights both best practice and the benefits that can come from thinking outside the box.”

Engagement

- 4.12 Through 2019/20, the service restructure has provided additional capacity to engage actively with users. Notwithstanding the challenges of Covid 19, the service is re-vamping its engagement process, building from quarterly Parish Forums (two dedicated to planning) to improve the relationships with both residents Assoc’s and Parish Councils. The Delivery Team restructure, creating three new Area Planning Teams, has also provided a new opportunity for improved “local” engagement by the service and its managers and staff – with residents Associations and Parishes, local communities and local members.
- 4.13 The success of consultation around the Local Plan using new digital channels has enabled the policy team to build capabilities for future digital/online engagement for the NEC Area Action Plan and future phases of consultation on the Local plan – and for engagement on wider service delivery.
- 4.14 We have also made considerable improvements to our internal engagement, through the introduction of fortnightly staff newsletters, monthly team meetings through face to face updates and a full service development day. The Covid emergency has seen the service move its staff engagement online – with a weekly video log from senior managers forming part of ongoing engagement and development activity.
- 4.15 All planning services traditionally receive a number of complaints. Through 2019/20, the service has managed and reported complaints using the respective Councils separate complaint systems. In Q4, the Service developed a new approach to complaints which has centralised monitoring and reporting and considerably improved our initial responsiveness to customers chasing progress on their applications and improve our ability to track and manage responses to complaints. This was rolled out in SCDC in January and has resulted in a reduction

in formal complaints of 55-60%. The same system was rolled out in CCC this month.

Service Programme

- 4.16 The Service has undertaken considerable levels of implementation and transformation activity in 2019/20:

ICT

- 4.17 The Service was the first area to be undertake rollout of Council Anywhere, which was successfully completed in June. Most staff have now been issued with new mobile phones and new GCSPS email addresses were brought into use in the middle of the year.
- 4.18 This year also saw the successful consolidation of the two planning systems (Uniform and Agile) into one single Uniform system in February – including the upgrade of the Land Charges System and the migration of over 1 million records from SCDC's legacy system. Through 2020/21 work to optimise the performance of the system through a server consolidation is expected to address system performance – particularly for officers accessing data remotely.

Workforce

- 4.19 The Service wide consultation on the structure and staffing of the Service concluded in June. The main outcomes of this were to introduce a tiered management structure, introduce area teams in Development Management, and recognise a number of posts as transitional / fixed term while the Service develops. Job roles, responding to recruitment pressures and staff feedback were also evolved to provide for career grades and mobility and opportunity for staff development within the service – in line with one of the core objectives set out.
- 4.20 Recognising the creation of a number of new line management posts, the service has focussed on development of management capability in its training offering in 2019/20 and expect to build on this with a more comprehensive leadership programme in 2020/21.
- 4.21 We have also strengthened our adherence to the PDR regime and regular 1:1s with the aim of improving performance management.
- 4.22 Considerable recruitment activity has been undertaken throughout the year. As we have refined our offering, our recruitment campaigns have become increasingly successful, with only a small number of roles now proving difficult to fill.

Delivery

- 4.23 Recruitment to most new key posts was completed, with, most recently, a permanent manager in place for the application support team (April 2020), delivery managers appointed in Q2 and area managers operational by the end of Q4 in Development Management. This additional management capacity will support the ongoing improvement in capacity and performance through 2020/21.

- 4.24 During 2019, to seek to underpin the capacity of the service, the Council entered a dialogue and contract with a planning support service –Terraquest - to provide additional 2call off” capacity on planning application determinations. This contract took some time to bring into effect and it was not until Q4 that staff were able to begin processing cases. The performance of the contract, and a review of the effectiveness of it, is underway.
- 4.25 Progress on business plan projects has been impacted by the greater than anticipated impacts of the ICT migration and service restructure. The pre-application process re-design, review of planning performance agreements and time recording projects begun in 2019/20 are expected to mature in Q2 2020/21 – aided by and capturing an accelerated move to online engagement caused by the Covid 19 pandemic.

Policy, Strategy and Economy

- 4.26 Notwithstanding the significant progress made with the Local Plan programme covered above, for most of 2019/20, the planning policy service were managed using interim arrangements. The successful recruitment to that role in Q4 means that the management team of the Strategy and Economy team is now complete. Internal and external recruitment, including through partnerships with Public Practice (a not for profit agency) has allowed the team to grow its capacity to support both policy development and delivering strategic support to both Administrations, but also to underpin progress on strategic sites and planning application processing.
- 4.27 The team has continued to provide specialist advice on development Related matters, including Urban design, landscape, Ecology, heritage and Trees, alongside engagement activities for the local Plan, Village Design Statements, Conservation and heritage, Brexit and Business development activities – most recently in response to Covid. Whilst programmed work including a review of design review processes has bene delayed, the team have supported the progression up to referendum stage, of neighbourhood plans for Cottenham and Histon and Impington. A programme to introduce time sheeting – and improve cost recovery has been delayed by capacity constraints and the need to procure an ICT solution but is now being delivered in Q2 of 2020/21 and will significantly improve upon cost recovery in this team through pre-app and PPA’s.

5. Implications

a) Financial Implications

The financial implications are shown in section 4.6 above and in the Appendix. The uncertainty associated with the current Covid 19 pandemic and its potential range of implications for development activity is being monitored and will need to be managed. Through 2019/20, the service was managed within its allocated budget, although adjustments associated with the shared services agreement and service recharges, as part of a corporate response to the Partnerships between Councils, prompted a need for a rebalancing of City Council costs in 2020/21.

Significant improvements in the financial structures and reporting systems in the service have been implemented following a service wide review of funding and budget planning arrangements by the business support team in 2019/20.

b) Staffing Implications

There are no staffing implications other than those highlighted above.

c) Equality and Poverty Implications

Not required for this report.

d) Environmental Implications

None for this report.

e) Procurement Implications

None specific related to the service. Any procurement relating to the service provision is carried out in line with the Councils' policies.

h) Background papers

Background papers used in the preparation of this report:
Shared Service Quarterly reports
Greater Cambridge Shared Services 2018/19 Annual Report
3C Shared Services 2018/19 Annual Report

i) Appendices

Planning Shared Service Budget Position and Service Performance Against Indicators

j) Inspection of papers

To inspect the background papers or if you have a query on the report please contact Fiona Bryant, Strategic Director, tel:01223 457325, email: fiona.bryant@cambridge.gov.uk.

APPENDIX.

FINANCE:

Shared Planning Service (£'000s)			
	Annual Budget	Actual *	Variance *
Expenditure	10,965	11,004	(39)
Income	(5,760)	(6,033)	273
Total	5,205	4,971	234

*Actual and variance figures are provisional as Finance still working to finalise accounts.

Performance

2019/20 KPI Performance	
KPI	Performance
Acknowledgement of applications within 2 days.	28.8%
Registration and validation within 5 days.	41.2%
Decision making within statutory or agreed timelines - Major applications.	69.0%
Decision making within statutory or agreed timelines – Minor applications.	63.9%
Decision making within statutory or agreed timelines – Other applications.	71.6%
Decision making within statutory or agreed timelines – all business applications.	66.9%
Percentage of applications submitted electronically/online.	79.1%
Percentage of applications valid upon submission.	75.7%
Percentage of all planning and related applications approved	80.5%
Average Number of days for planning decision householders.	102.1