



**EXECUTIVE OVERVIEW
AND SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE: 13 January 2022**

PLANNING COMMITTEE: 9 February 2022

CABINET: 8 March 2022

Report of: Corporate Director of Place & Community

Relevant Portfolio Holder: Cllr G Owen

**Contact for further information: Heidi McDougall (Extn. 5191)
(Heidi.mcdougall@westlancs.gov.uk)**

SUBJECT: PLANNING SERVICES REVIEW UPDATE REPORT

Wards Affected: Borough wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To outline the proposed actions and update members on progress with implementing the recommendations of the planning services review.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS TO EXECUTIVE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

2.1 That the Committee consider the report and that the agreed comments of the Executive Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the Planning Services Review Update Report be passed to Cabinet for their consideration.

3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS TO CABINET

3.1 That Cabinet note the Summary Level Project Plan, attached at appendix 1

4.0 RECOMMENDATIONS TO PLANNING COMMITTEE

4.1 That the agreed comments of Planning Committee be forwarded to the Corporate Director Place and Community for consideration in consultation with the relevant Portfolio Holder.

5.0 BACKGROUND

- 5.1 In June 2021, Cabinet agreed to the implementation of the recommendations from the Planning Services Review Report.
- 5.2 A working group was established, made up of representatives from across the council including the planning service, the business intelligence team, IT, the communication and digital team and planning support, led by the Corporate Director of Place and Community to drive forward the implementation of the recommendations.
- 5.3 It was also agreed that Red Quadrant would continue to be involved in taking forward a number of the recommendations to create capacity and drive forward implementation.
- 5.4 Throughout June and July 2021, the working group reviewed all the recommendations made by Red Quadrant. Each recommendation was grouped according to the following themes; the steps required to accomplish each of the recommendations were then outlined and documented:
- Enforcement
 - Pre-application Process
 - Interface with Business Support
 - Complaint Handling
 - Customer Self-Service
 - Workforce Planning

These themes are dependent on the outcome of the Planning white paper, financial constraints, and staff resources. At the heart of each theme will be the use of technology to both make processes more efficient and enable customers to self-serve, improving communication and engagement and delivering a range of training for officers and members.

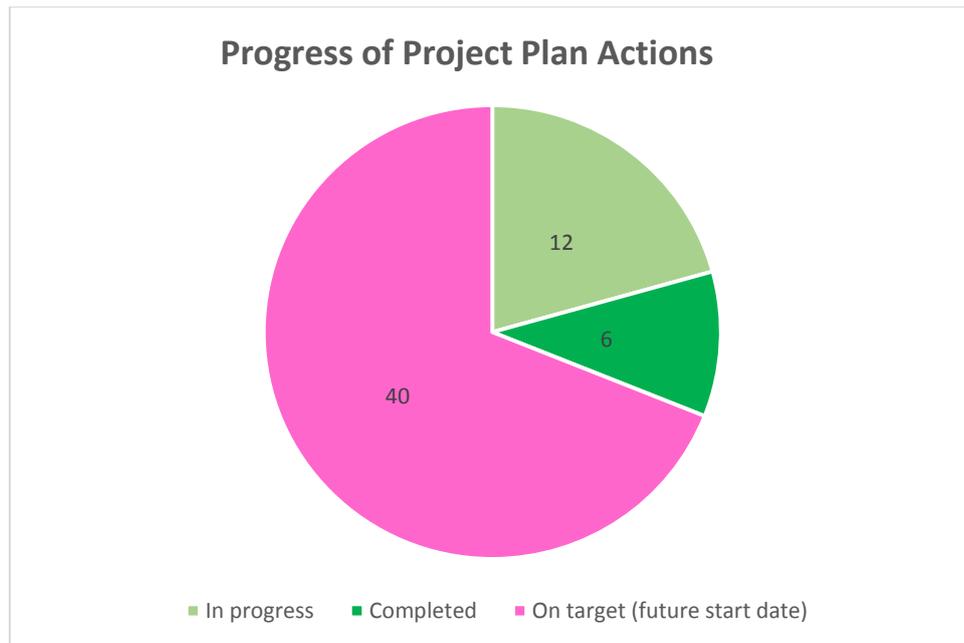
- 5.5 In September 2021, the action plan containing all the recommendations, sub tasks and timescales was agreed, albeit feedback was received requesting that future updates include specific implementation dates of future actions.

6.0 CURRENT POSITION

- 6.1 The Planning Review Implementation Project officially commenced in October 2021; the current expected completion date is November 2022. 81 recommendations were made by Red Quadrant, across 11 areas of focus. These were organised into a formal project plan, covering 56 main actions, further sub-divided into 210 individual tasks and approximate completion dates have been included. These are target dates only and will require

flexibility in delivery, due to the constraints on resources currently being experienced.

- 6.2 In order to release experienced members of the team to devote time to project delivery, the recruitment of two temporary Planning Officers was approved under delegation. The Planning Service have a statutory workload, which is currently operating with a backlog of applications, due to non-project-related vacancies within the team, and the impact of COVID-19.
- 6.3 The two temporary project posts were advertised and subsequently recruited to from within the Planning Service, promoting two Planning Officers to Senior Planning Officers providing them with value experience of dealing with more challenging applications. The two temporary Planner Officer posts (backfill positions) have been re-advertised; however, it should be noted that there is a significant lack of available Planning Officers, both locally, and nationally. This means that recruiting suitable candidates remains a challenge and it is highly likely that other options, incurring additional costs, will need to be considered, such as use of agency workers or market supplement payments to ensure that sufficient resources are secured.
- 6.4 Despite the challenges with resources, the team have made good progress in carrying out the project tasks. A copy of the updated project plan is attached at Appendix 1, which shows that the following activities have been completed:
- The quick wins have been completed, including reviewing information currently available on the website, and developing a new appointment booking system for members who wish to speak directly with Planning Officers. The appointment system was launched on 10 January 2022.
 - A review of the Enforcement Process has commenced; a full end-to-end process map detailing the steps taken by the Planning Service and the Planning Support Team (within Business Support Services) was developed; a workshop was held with Red Quadrant to discuss the Enforcement Charter; discussions have commenced regarding the interaction with Legal Services; a first draft of the new Enforcement Charter has been drafted by Red Quadrant and is currently being reviewed by the team.
 - The Pre-App process has commenced; a full end-to-end process map detailing the steps taken by the Planning Service and the Planning Support Team (within Business Support Services) was developed; opportunities and barriers were discussed and captured and are being worked through to develop a more streamlined service.
- 6.5 Of the 58 main actions derived from the Red Quadrant recommendations:



- **31%** are in progress or completed.
- **69%** are on target with scheduled future start dates. See the project plan attached in appendix 1.

6.6 The team are approximately a quarter of the way through the project lifecycle; 31% demonstrates that the project is on target and actions are progressing at a good pace.

7.0 NEXT STEPS

7.1 The working group will continue to meet on a regular basis and monitor the delivery of the actions. Progress will also be reported into the Our Future; Our People Transformation Programme Board, Cabinet, Executive Overview & Scrutiny Committee and Planning Committee as required.

7.2 The focus over the next three months will be on reviewing the Enforcement Charter, providing feedback to Red Quadrant and agreeing a final version through the appropriate committee. A workshop will be held with Legal Services to develop a Service Level Agreement and review resource. Opportunities to improve and streamline the Enforcement internal process and the Pre-App service will be examined and future processes will be mapped out and steps identified to enable implementation.

8.0 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

8.1 The recommendations look to modernise and make the service more efficient whilst maximising income opportunities and providing a clear offer for customers making the service more sustainable and improving customer satisfaction.

8.2 This report has no significant impacts upon crime and disorder.

9.0 FINANCIAL AND RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The additional costs associated with recruiting temporary planning staff will be met from vacant posts and the reserve.

10.0 RISK ASSESSMENT

- 10.1 The risk of not taking forward the recommendations will continue to impact on service delivery. Regular monitoring will enable progress to be mapped and resources reviewed.
- 10.2 The risk of not recruiting to the vacant planning posts will affect service delivery and progress with implementing the review. The posts will be advertised and other options considered to ensure that sufficient resource is available.

11.0 HEALTH AND WELLBEING IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 If additional staff resources are not provided to manage the current vacancies, daily workloads, backlog of cases and the recommendations of the review, the quantity of work could have a direct impact on the health and wellbeing of the current staff. The addition of extra resources into the team will help to create some capacity to manage this work moving forward.

Background Documents

There are no background documents (as defined in Section 100D(5) of the Local Government Act 1972) to this Report.

Equality Impact Assessment

There is no direct impact on members of the public, employees, elected members and / or stakeholders by virtue of this report. Therefore an Equality Impact Assessment is not required.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Planning Service Review Summary Level Project Plan