Planning Service: Interim Improvement Plan

July 2020

Development Management

milton keynes council

Contents page

1. Purpose of the Interim Improvement Plan

1.1 An independent review of Milton Keynes Council's Planning Service is currently being undertaken. This is in response to the way Application 16/03023/FUL – a Storage and Distribution Warehouse scheme at Blakelands 1, Yeomans Drive - has been decided and processed. The review was commissioned following concerns about how and why a Planning Committee decision to approve the scheme with conditions resulted in a Decision Notice being issued without 14 of the planning conditions agreed by Committee.

1.2 Whilst this review has not been completed, the Council has concurrently undertaken an assessment of its planning performance and processes. This has resulted in the "Interim Improvement Plan" which will be updated following the conclusion of the independent review. The Plan has taken into account relevant good practice guidance published by the Planning Advisory Service (PAS) which includes key principles for managing a Development Management Service (March 2016)[1]. A number of these principles are particularly pertinent in guiding the current improvements that are being progressed within the service, for example:

- **Meeting targets is as much about work flow as it is about capacity** - Regularly review how work is moving through the process; constantly ask: is this step / check / hand-off absolutely necessary / what purpose does it serve?

- **Never underestimate people's propensity to complicate things** - It is often anxiety about making mistakes ("what if?") that build delay into the process. Keep things simple by empowering your people and collectively owning mistakes.

- **You will be tempted to swap expensive staff for cheaper staff** - Especially to do the more straightforward parts of the process. Beware. Any saving in cost per hour is very quickly lost in the cost of hand-offs, queueing and several people picking up the same piece of work and having to get their heads round it.

- **Something will go wrong one day** - When things go wrong you'll be tempted to get everybody's work signed off by someone more senior (and more expensive). You will tell yourself these extra checks remove the possibility for error. **They won't**. Delegate everything down to a level where people are comfortable with "what is right".

- **Every minute spent on an application adds up to 2 days work for every 1,000 applications** - Small changes in process can make a difference.

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[1] https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/managing-dm-process-pdf-fe8.pdf

- **Handle an application as few times as possible -** In an ideal world that would be twice, once when it comes in, once when it goes out. With the correct procedures in place that could be achievable for simple applications. Every time an application has to be handled it gets in a queue again, even if it is the same person doing the handling at each stage.

- **Keep the process map as simple as possible** - In an ideal world there would be just one route that every application takes. Wherever there is a branch in a process map there is scope for (mis) interpretation and wrong turns, handovers and delays. This can't be avoided altogether because it starts at the very beginning where there are various ways of entering the system - paper applications vs. Planning Portal - but avoid unnecessary branches.

- **Do it because it's good customer service not because the targets require it** - In most cases if you are providing good customer service you will also be meeting the targets. Don't do things to meet the target which actually make the service to the customer worse.

2. Delivering the Interim Plan

2.1 The Ministry of Housing and Local Government (MHCLG) has two key indicators for measuring the performance of a councils development management function. These relate to the number of applications that are determined within prescribed time limits and the percentage of applications that have been allowed on appeal[2]. The latest figures published for Milton Keynes Council are set out in tables 1 and 2 below. This includes, for reference, corresponding figures for two adjoining planning authorities (Aylesbury Vale District Council and Central Bedfordshire Council) that have a broadly similar population size and number of planning applications.

| | Jan18 - Dec 19 | | | | | | | | | |
| | No. of applications | | | Applications determined within time | | | | LPA rank | | |
	MKC	AVDC	CBC	MHCLG Target	**MKC**	AVDC	CBC	**MKC**	AVDC	CBC
Major (13 weeks or agreed extension)	**206**	133	266	60%	**82.5%**	73.7%	86.1%	**255**	314	224
Non-major (8 weeks or agreed extension)	**2538**	3072	3987	70%	**95.4%**	74.7%	89.1%	**62**	331	187

Table 1: Major and non-major applications determined in time

| | Oct 16 - Sept 18 | | | | | | |
| | Applications overturned at appeal | | | | LPA rank | | |
	MHCLG Target	**MKC**	AVDC	CBC	**MKC**	AVDC	CBC
Major	10%	**2.0%**	4.7%	3.0%	**195**	299	251
Non-major	10%	**0.5%**	1.2%	0.7%	**66**	241	131

Table 2: Percentage of applications allowed on appeal

2.2 These figures show that performance of Milton Keynes Council's Development Management Service against these measures is good and significantly achieves the MHCLG targets. A key element of the Interim Improvement Plan is to ensure this performance is maintained and the Council can respond positively to any future changes to these targets.

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[2] Live tables on planning application statistics (Tables P151; P152; P153 & P154) -
https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-planning-application-statistics

2.3   However, it is recognised that these indicators are limited in defining whether all of the council's development management functions are being delivered in an effective and efficient manner. Therefore, to support the improvement planning process, the PAS development management toolkit (December 2015)[3] has been reviewed. This toolkit sets out how councils should seek to understand and improve their development management services. It poses a series of questions that cover the various stages of the development management process. This assists in identifying those measures that could result in improved ways of working.

2.4   An amended version of this toolkit was sent to the Council's Planning Service to complete as part of the independent review. A series of meetings were held by officers within the Planning Service over May/June 2019 to go through the toolkit. These included input from the Council's Development Management Manager, Deputy Development Management Manager, two Senior Planning Officers and two Planning Officers. Additional input was also provided on specific matters by the Technical Planning Manager, Senior Enforcement Officer, Senior Planning Officer- Policy and the Business Improvements Project Manager. This was to ensure that all questions were addressed in full. The completed toolkit (Annex A) was forwarded to the consultant undertaking the independent review in July 2019.

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[3] https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/download-dm-challenge-too-e24.pdf

3. Objectives and Actions

3.1 In considering the questions set out in the PAS Development Management toolkit, a number of 'Actions' were identified that could help to deliver service improvements. These actions have been reviewed, recognising that the improvement planning process needs to be ongoing, and are set out below. They form the basis of an Action Plan (Annex B) that is being taken forward by the service. This has been further informed by feedback following discussions that have taken place with a wide range of stakeholders, developers and agents, Ward Councillors and Town/Parish Councils, which have been reflected in additional actions that have been included in the Action Plan.

3.2 A number of the actions that were identified through the completion of the PAS Development Management toolkit have already been progressed. As such, there are some actions that have already been largely completed or started before the preparation of this Interim Improvement Plan. Where relevant these have been retained in the Action Plan as an ongoing action and comments/notes added to identify the progress that has already been made.

3.3 The Action Plan seeks to deliver the overall aim of the Interim Improvement Plan, which is to continue to build a resilient, robust and high performing and professional Development Management service.

Objective 1: Development and maintenance of robust and effective processes

Actions:

a) Review and adapt pre-application and PPA process and develop appropriate process map and procedure note – as a key stage in the planning application process, the provision of pre-application advice, including through Planning Performance Agreements, can lack openness and transparency. Therefore, the review of this service will focus on clarifying the processes that are followed in providing pre-application advice and how this will be communicated to stakeholders (such as Town/Parish Councils and Ward Councillors) and clarify the charges that will be applied to different types of development proposal. This review should take into account the 10 commitments for effective pre-application engagement[4], pre-application self assessment questionnaire[5] and other guidance on pre-application services[6] published by PAS. The aim of pre-application advice is to reduce the number of applications being submitted that would receive an in principle objection, or to

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[4] https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/10-commitments-effective--927.pdf
[5] https://www.local.gov.uk/pas/pas-topics/planning-applications/pre-application-self-assessment-questionnaire
[6] https://www.local.gov.uk/pas/pas-topics/planning-applications/pre-application-suite

identify changes that would make a proposal more likely to secure planning permission. Therefore, it forms a key element of the development management function seeking to improve the quality of development proposals that are then submitted as planning applications. Measuring the effectiveness of the pre-application service would require monitoring the number of planning applications that have received pre-application advice. This can then be used to identify whether these applications have taken into account the pre-application advice provided.

b) Prepare and adopt a Local Validation List – the Local Validation List (LVL) will aid the validation process be setting out those documents that need to be submitted alongside different types of development proposal. This will provide clarity for applicants on what documents need to be submitted for an application to be valid. It should reduce the number of invalid applications that are submitted as this creates an additional cost and delay to the determination of a planning application.

c) Review and adapt inclusion of standard conditions – planning conditions should be kept to a minimum and only used where they are necessary; relevant to planning; relevant to the development to be permitted; enforceable; precise; and reasonable in all other respects. In addition, pre-commencement conditions must not be imposed on the grant of planning permission without the written agreement of the applicant. Therefore, it is necessary to undertake periodic reviews of applications to identify whether the use of planning conditions meets these tests. This should take into account best practice guidance published by PAS on using and discharging conditions[7].

d) Review and adapt validation process map and procedure note – applications go through a validation process to determine if the correct documents have been submitted and required fee paid. If a submitted application is valid, then the eight or thirteen week deadline for determining the application starts from the date it was originally received by the Council. Therefore, it is important that validation works effectively and does not cause unnecessary delay to the determination of a planning application. The process map and procedure note will provide consistency for officers involved in validating a planning application.

e) Review and adapt s106 process map and procedure note – s106 agreements are negotiated where a developer contribution is required to mitigate the impacts of a proposal, principally through the provision of new infrastructure. Legal agreements can involve lengthy negotiation which must be completed before a decision notice can be issued. Therefore, it is important that the s106 process works effectively and does not cause unnecessary delay to issuing a decision notice for a planning application that has been

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[7] https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/download-using-and-discha-fc3.pdf

approved. The process map and procedure note will provide consistency for officers involved in negotiating and securing s106 planning obligations.

f) Review and adapt enforcement process map and procedure note – enforcement cases can be particularly challenging and contentious. Ultimately this can involve a notice being served on the owner to undertake action to remedy the harm created by the unauthorised development. It is important that these notices are robust and the Council follows the necessary procedures prior to, and after, serving a notice. This includes the involvement of colleagues within the Council's Legal team, as well as enforcement officers within the Planning Service. It is important that the enforcement process operates in an effective and timely manner. The process map and procedure note will provide consistency for officers involved in undertaking enforcement action.

g) Review and adapt appeals process map and procedure note – where planning applications are refused the applicant has a right of appeal to the Planning Inspectorate. This right also exists for landowners who seek to challenge an Enforcement Notice that has been issued by the Council. Whilst the performance of the Planning Service in defending appeals is good (table 2), it is important to ensure this standard is maintained and all planning officers are clear on the process they need to follow and how ward Councillors and the Town/Parish Council should be engaged. Appeals related to DCC/DCP decisions that are contrary to the planning officer's recommendation can be particularly challenging. In these instances it is important that members of the committee are involved in defending the appeal and the performance of the Council recorded.

h) Review and adapt process for preparation and review of DCC/DCP reports – whilst the majority of planning applications are determined by officers under delegated authority, larger or controversial applications are referred to DCC or DCP for determination. Some proposals can be extremely complex and require the application of professional planning judgement when arriving at a recommendation. It is essential that reports to committee are clearly set out and justified to ensure Councillors have the necessary information to make a well informed decision that is not open to challenge. Therefore, reports needs to be prepared in a manner that allows sufficient time for review by Managers and Team Leaders within the Planning Service, as well as input from colleagues within the Council's Legal team.

i) Review and adapt process for undertaking and recording site visits – site visits are a key element of the planning officer's assessment of a planning application. This can reveal elements of the scheme that would not otherwise be visible from online images, such as Google streetview. Therefore, it is important that site visits are undertaken by planning officers, as part of considering a planning application, and recorded in a consistent manner.

j) Undertake monthly monitoring checks of DM processes – whilst the establishment of process maps and procedure notes should ensure consistency in the operation of the Development Management service, it is necessary to undertake regular monitoring checks. This will enable the Development Management Manager and Team Leaders to confirm the revised systems/ processes are operating effectively. This will involve a sample check of applications approved in each month to confirm:

i. Descriptions of development proposal are clear and concise
ii. Application documents are correctly referenced and uploaded onto Public Access
iii. Site notice posted within the first week following validation of an application
iv. Site visits undertaken and notes/photos accurately recorded on Uniform
v. Consultation responses are uploaded onto Public Access within two working days of receipt
vi. Delegated officer reports are correctly formatted, clear and robust
vii. All conditions have been included on decision notices

Objective 2: Retention of workforce capacity and developed capability.

Actions:

a) Review resources and skills within the service – many of the improvements identified, as well as the maintenance and monitoring of improvement plans, will require a dedicated project management expertise to be embedded within the Planning Service. This will also be needed to provide effective support for the governance structures that are in place to monitor and manage the performance of the planning service. In addition, the existing structure of the Development Management team is flat and does not easily allow for career progression. This has resulted in a significant challenge for officers when making the transition from Planning Officer to Senior Planning Officer where they are expected to manage cases related to very significant and contentious developments. The current service structure provides no clear progression path which has also resulted in the loss of experienced individuals. This could be remedied by replacing the current planning officers and senior planning officer posts with planning officers, senior planning officers and principal planning officers. Alongside the existing Development Management Managers and East/West Team Leaders, this would ensure the largest and most contentious development proposals are dealt with suitably qualified and experienced officers.

b) Monitor weekly performance statistics – whilst the key performance indicators are identified under objective 3b, there is a need to ensure this data is used to monitor the performance and capacity of the service. This is to be undertaken through 1:1 meetings

with officers and case reviews to ensure individual officers' workload can be delivered to a high level.

c) Prepare library of training materials for officers and Councillors – a range of organisations undertake research and publish best practice. This includes professional bodies (such as the RTPI), the Local Government Association and Planning Advisory Service, as well as individual organisations (such as the Town and Country Planning Association) and companies. Much of this material is relevant to the continued professional development of officers and may be of assistance or interest to members of the Development Control Committee. Therefore, a shared resource or library, which includes new material as it is identified by individual users, could provide assistance as an aid to training and development.

d) Briefing to DCC members on roles and responsibilities and training for committee chairs– each member of DCC undergoes training. As with professional planning officers, it is important that DCC members are fully briefed on how the planning system works and their role in making decisions that are not open to challenge and can be robustly defended at appeal.

e) Maintain service training plan – planning officers that are members of the RTPI are require to maintain Professional Development Plans and undertake Continued Professional Development. There is also a need to ensure new Development Services Assistants and Planning Officers, who are not members of the RTPI, have access to a programme of training that will aid their professional development.

f) Support officers to obtain professional qualification – many officers joining the Planning services, either as a Development Services Officer or Planning Officer, do not have a planning related qualification or significant experience of working within a local planning authority. Therefore, it is important to ensure their continued professional development is supported, which will aid their career development. This can be through supporting individuals through offering the opportunity to undertake a postgraduate masters degree and/or working towards obtaining corporate membership of the RTPI.

Objective 3: Reliable IT systems that respond effectively to customer demand

Actions:

a) Review in-team IT management resource – the Planning Service is reliant on customised IT systems that are critically important to manage customer demand and support the work of officers. At present there is not a dedicated post responsible for the effective operation of these systems.

b) Regular updating of the Planning webpages to include a full annual audit – a significant amount of information is held on the Planning pages of the Council's website. It is essential that this is kept up-to-date and is in an easily accessible format for customers. Where necessary out-of-date information needs to be removed and pages updated to reflect changes to the Development Management processes and procedures as set out in this Interim Improvement Plan. Alongside regular updates, this also needs to include a more comprehensive annual audit of all pages to ensure that they are up-to-date.

c) Develop programme of improvements for Uniform and Public Access DM Portal – Uniform is the main IT system used by planning officers to monitor progress of a planning application and record key events (e.g. site visits, consultation letters, decision dates, conditions, etc.). A significant amount of the performance data used by the service is extracted from reports generated by the system. Public Access is also the main interface for customers to monitor progress with a planning application. Therefore, they are critically important tools that aid the effective operation of the service and PAS has published guidance on managing ICT systems to support planning[8]. It is essential that future developments of these systems are fit-for-purpose and respond to customer and user feedback. Particular actions include:

   i.   Create a clearer reporting tool to extract robust data that can be presented in an easily accessible format and used to monitor service performance
   ii.   Establish permission profiles to ensure relevant officers have the appropriate level of access to amend and upload documents
   iii. Remove unnecessary steps in the process and handovers between different officers
   iv.   Ensure control mechanisms are in place to minimise the risk of decisions being issued without the correct conditions
   v.   Prepare guidance notes and establish a programme of training for new starters (as part of their induction) to ensure consistency and accuracy in officers' use of Uniform

Objective 4: To be recognised by stakeholders and customers as a professional and high performing service that responds effectively to feedback

Actions:

a) Prepare a communications plan to report on service improvements and performance – the Planning Service has a wide range of customers (such as applicant's, developers and their agents; members of the public, Town and Parish Councils; statutory and other consultees; Ward Councillors). This places a range of demands and expectations on the

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[8] https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/managing-ict-systems-supp-3ce.pdf

service, alongside differing views over how it should operate. In particular, cases can often be challenging and require detailed investigation before they can be responded to and addressed. Therefore, a communications plan would help to co-ordinate the activities undertaken by the service and outline how these will be communicated to relevant stakeholders in a timely manner. In developing the communications plan and reporting on performance, it is essential that the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transport is recognised as a key representative of the Council's Planning Service. Therefore, monthly briefings will be provided to the Portfolio Holder that include an update on those performance measures listed in objective 3b.

b) Communicate on key performance indicators – it is recognised that the government's planning applications statistics are only one measure of performance. There is a need to establish a suite of indicators that can be monitored to show how the service is operating overall and identify feedback and issues that may need to be addressed. A range of measures have been identified that will be monitored. These will be included within a six monthly performance report to the Council's Development Control Committee and reported to the Planning Improvement Board:

    i.   MHCLG stats (see table 1 and 2 above)
    ii.   % applications validated within two working days hours
    iii.   Number of planning applications approved, refused and withdrawn
    iv.   Number of appeals allowed/dismissed (delegated and DCC/DCP decisions)
    v.   % of LGO complaints about the Planning Service that are upheld and % of LGO recommendations that are implemented within time
    vi.   % of consultee responses received within 21 days (by consultee)[9]
    vii.   % of consultation responses uploaded onto Public Access within two working days[9]
    viii.   % of correspondence from the Planning inspectorate uploaded onto Public Access within two working days[9]
    ix.   Average number of planning applications per Planning Officer (total on hand and determined)
    x.   Average number of planning applications per Senior Planning Officer (total on hand and determined)
    xi.   Average time taken (from date of validation) to put up site notice and undertake site visit[10]
    xii.   Average number of cases per enforcement officer (total on hand and closed)
    xiii.   Average time taken to complete initial site investigation for an enforcement case[10]
    xiv.   Average time taken to close an enforcement case[10]

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[9] Uniform does not currently provide a reporting tool on this data and it is not possible to measure this indicator.
[10] A change is required to Uniform to set up a report for this indicator.

xv. Hours of training that have been provided (per year) and the average % of DCC Members and Planning Officers that attend a training session

There are also qualitative measures that will need to be reviewed to ensure other aspects of the Planning Service's work are monitored. Therefore, it is proposed to undertake sample checks each month of those elements listed above in objective 1(j).

All of these measures will provide a comprehensive suite of information that will help to identify any training and development needs, problems with the Service's Development Management systems and processes, as well as help to inform 1:1 meetings and performance reviews with officers across the service.

c) Review DCC/DCP decisions made contrary to recommendation – there are a number of decisions by DCP/DCC that are made contrary to the planning officer's recommendation. An analysis of these decisions will help to identify those issues where there is an apparent difference between committee and planning officers in the application and interpretation of planning policy. This would allow for the consideration of further training opportunities or amendments to committee reports to aid service performance and delivery.

d) Develop strong relationships with Town/Parish Councils – Town and Parish Councils are a key stakeholder that engages with the Planning Service on a frequent basis. As a democratically elected and accountable body their input to the planning system is extremely important. This includes through the preparation of Neighbourhood Plans which, once made/adopted, form part of the statutory development plan and have to be applied by the planning service through the determination of relevant planning applications. A number of specific sub-actions have been identified to support the delivery of this action:

i. Arrange quarterly Town/Parish Council liaison meetings
ii. Prepare a Planning Manual for Town/Parish Councils
iii. Establish a Town/Parish Council buddy system where a named planning officer would be available to respond to any general planning queries or issues and attend Town/Parish Council meetings (including a review after six months to obtain feedback)
iv. Prepare training material for Town/Parish Councils and offer training opportunities

e) Develop and deliver training to DCC – a key aspect of the work of the Development Management team is providing support for the Development Control Committee to ensure the Council makes decisions that cannot be challenged through the courts or overturned at appeal. This includes the provision of training and policy updates on issues that are of interest or concern to Councillors. These events are included within the training plan for the

service (see objective 2 above) and are open to all Ward Councillors, as well as Town and Parish Councils.

f) Undertake annual performance review with DCC members – the development management team submits reports to the Development Control Panel (DCP) and Development Control Committee (DCC). At these meetings, members of the committees are responsible for determining those planning applications where officers do not have delegated authority as set out in the Council's constitution. It is, therefore, a critically important element of the Council's decision making processes, especially for large scale and controversial planning applications. An annual session with DCC at the end of the meeting in April could be used to elicit feedback on performance from all members of the committee. This would then allow the development management team to reflect on any comments through future service delivery and iterations of the Improvement Plan.

g) Undertake customer feedback survey – as outlined above, there is a wide range of customers that engage with the Planning Service. However, no information has been collated to show the experience of these different groups and whether there other issues that need to be considered and addressed through the delivery of the Council's development management functions. Therefore, an annual customer survey will be undertaken to obtain feedback from a sample of applicants/agents/developers, consultees, ward Councillors and Town/Parish Councils.

h) Review the DM Customer Charter – the charter was published in July 2017 and sets out the key aspects of how the Planning Service will respond to customers. This includes the timescale for dealing with enquiries and processing planning applications. However, it does not include any performance measures. As a key document setting out how the service communicates with its customers, it is important to ensure the development management Customer Charter reflects the programme of improvements being progressed by the Planning Service.

i) Review the enforcement guide and plan – the enforcement plan was published in August 2017 and sets out the role and function of the Council's enforcement team. The enforcement unauthorised development is important to maintain the credibility of the planning system, albeit action is only appropriate where it is considered proportionate and expedient. Such development can be of significant interest to the local community. Therefore, it is important that information on enforcement cases/action is disseminated to key stakeholders after cases have been investigated and actioned. As a key document setting out how the service responds to customers' concerns, it is important to ensure the Council's enforcement plan reflects the programme of improvements being progressed by the Planning Service.

j) Arrange bi-annual agents and consultee forums – the effective and smooth operation of the planning system relies on the effective input of developers/agents and consultees. This includes understanding changes to policy and guidance, as well as the systems and processes being implemented by the Planning Service. Therefore, the establishment of forums will help to disseminate key messages as well as provide an opportunity to secure feedback on the service that is being provided.

h) Arrange monthly liaison meetings with MKC consultees – there is a wide range of teams and services across the Council that are consulted on planning applications and provide responses. This includes Highways Development Management, Housing Strategy, Consultation, Landscape, Urban Design, the Lead Local Flood Authority, etc. It is important that there is regular communication with these consultees to ensure all of the Council's internal processes operate effectively in providing a comprehensive and robust response on planning applications.

4. Monitoring and Review

4.1 It is recognised that there will always be room for improvement within any service. Therefore, the improvement planning process is not fixed and a number of the actions identified in this interim plan will require ongoing monitoring to ensure the benefits to service delivery are maintained.

4.2 Work on the service improvements initially commenced with the completion of the work undertaken in the summer 2019 and set out in Annex A. As outlined above, this resulted in the identification of a range of actions that have subsequently been reviewed through the preparation of this Interim Improvement Plan. Some actions, whilst included in the Action Plan (Annex B) for completeness, have already been completed and embedded within the working practice of the service. These now represent business as usual and will be kept under review to ensure that they are being effectively implemented. To ensure these completed actions are fully embedded in the work of the Service, it is anticipated that an annual audit will be required to demonstrate the completed actions continue to be implemented in an effective and robust manner.

4.3 The interim plan will be revised following the conclusions and any recommendations from the independent review of the Council's Planning Service that is currently taking place. This is to ensure the plan remains up-to-date and fit for purpose. It is also intended to undertake a further review of the PAS Development Management Challenge Toolkit once the actions set out in this Interim Improvement Plan have been implemented. This would provide a basis for identifying any additional actions that could be added to future reviews of the plan.

MKC Planning Review completed PAS Development Management challenge toolkit (July 2019)

1.Development Management - Customer, Community and Service Promises
MK has a Development Management Charter that sets out its commitments to good performance and fair decision making on planning applications

Like all other Planning Authorities, MK has consulted residents and businesses on a City Plan and a set of planning policies and development standards. These are all published on the Council's web site and are the basis for deciding planning applications.

Almost all decisions are made by planning officers under delegated powers, leaving a few important, strategic or especially contentious applications for planning committee.

Planning Committee members are all trained before they sit on committee.

Planning decisions are "community decisions". Planning is about finding the balance between housing and business growth on the one hand - and good building design, quality environmental standards and protecting the fair amenity of existing homes and businesses on the other. The agreed policies and development standards of MK are the criteria used to find that balance. These are the only things that can be used to consider planning decisions. The impact on the value of a property neighbouring the proposed development cannot be taken into consideration. The things that can be considered are called "relevant planning matters" – they include:
- the quality of the design;
- does the application fit into the character of the area;
- does the proposal overshadow or dominate a neighbour's property to a level that significantly changes the quality of life and environment of the occupants;
- noise and light pollution; severe traffic congestion; unacceptable flooding.

On contentious applications, the balance between a recommendation for approval and refusal can be fine. In these cases officers must be careful to present a professional and well - judged case to Planning Committee. Trained elected members must consider that balance and in public, find a final decision. Planning Committee can overturn an officer's recommendation – but it must be on "relevant planning matters".

A good planning service...

Sets out a customer promise to planning applicants and the community and monitors against this promise and publishes the results.

Clearly sets out which decisions should be delegated to officers and which to Planning Committee

Has clear policies and standards for deciding planning applications – and these are understood by both supporters and objectors to planning applications.

Has a clear and ongoing training plan for officers and councillors who assess and make decisions on planning applications.

At Planning Committee – officers and members make it clear to the public how application decisions will be made.

Monitor the planning application process – a) the efficiency and effectiveness of process for neighbours and the community; for applicants and for officers and members and b) the delivery of the objectives of the MK City plan and its development standards.

Questions	Comments
1.1 How does MK keep officers and members up to date on planning regulations and good planning application decision making?	Members are kept up to date via training sessions held periodically and also through briefing notes and updates on appeal decisions which are shared at DCC/DCP.
1.2 How does MK check and review the efficiency and effectiveness of its planning application process for all its stakeholders?	We conduct process reviews on various internal procedures to identify improvements or to move procedures in line with latest policy or legislation. Hold agent forums to obtain feedback. Established parish council buddy system pairing an Officer with a parish/town council within the Borough.
1.3 How does MK ensure good pre application practice? Do pre apps go to Planning Committee? If not why not?	Pre-application service offers a variety of options for applicants, inclusive of meetings and formal responses. Formal responses, once completed by an Officer, are then signed off by a Senior Officer prior to being issued to the applicant. Pre-applications enquires are confidential and not circulated via the public access system, hence it would be inappropriate for such applications to be discussed at a Planning Committee.

1.4 Are measures in place to help MK understand and manage the work of planning committee? - Count of applications going to committee - Time taken for committee to make decisions (cf deferrals) - Counts of overturns - Survey consultees and objectors about how well Committee performs	Count of applications taken to committee is held within our Uniform system. Time taken to make decisions held with Legal and Democratic Services Team. Recently issued 'decision sheet' is indexed to each committee meeting to indicate if a decision was an overturn or in line with officer recommendation. ACTION: Survey consultees and objectors. Set up Surveys / questionnaires to be produced in due course. Survey to be provided on evening on of DCC / DCP for objectors. Emails issued to consultees (frequency to be agreed). ACTION: Collate information on number of committee overturns. Work on process to ensure consistent means of monitoring number of committee overturns via our Uniform System.
1.5 How does MK ensure that that planning decisions are made well and quickly – but also in a way that consultees and objectors feel they are properly involved?	- We encourage applicant to use pre-application advice service. - Consistency in dealing with consultation responses. Consultee comments addressed fully within reports. - We measure our rate of determining applications within the statutory time period. - Recently implemented appeals spreadsheet, which is reported to Development Control Committee, including lessons learnt.
1.6 How does MK make sure planning committee members can question an officer's report and recommendation and know when they can over turn it?	- The structure of committee enables questioning, discussion and the putting forward of motions within committee meetings. - Legal and Head of Planning / DM Manager are present at meetings in order to provide effective support to members. - We provide opportunity for Members to submit specific questions for Officer's to answer prior to committee meetings.

1.7 MK DM Charter – is it monitored and published? What is MK's performance – improving/declining? Does MK have a DM Improvement plan?	- Milton Keynes Council Development Management (published July 2017) is available online and provided to new Officers. - Performance stats are held internally and are produced quarterly and issued to all DM Officers. - We have dedicated Business Improvements Project Manager. ACTION: Charter to be reviewed by end of 2019.
1.8 How does MK make sure officers and members know their respective roles and work well together?	- Recent implementation of 'DCC Councillor / Planning Service Communication (Customer Service) Discussions' held annually (or whenever considered necessary). - Member and Officer training to help understand role within the DCC/DCP process. - 'Member Charter' provided to outline Member role within DCC/DCP Process. - Briefing held before every DCC/DCP meeting. Legal and Democratic Services present to provide support.
1.9 How effective is MK's scheme of delegation (delegated decision to an officer or decision by Committee) – how often reviewed?	- Effective in terms of ensuring that Officers have wide ranging powers of delegation to determine applications without high numbers of cases being determined at DCC/DCP. - ACTION: Consider reviewing the effectiveness of the Scheme of Delegation so that it remains fit for purpose.

2. Pre-application

Good pre-app improves the quality of applications submitted to the council in the longer term. It enables early involvement in the evolution of a scheme and resolution of issues (or progress towards) prior to submission.

A good planning service...
Has a good and well-publicised pre-application service which acts as effective branding for a council that is both open for business and cares about environmental standards and neighbouring amenity.
Provides a pre-application service that - reduces costs to the council at application stage; - leads to fewer refusals and appeals; - turns away early "no-hope" applications at very low cost for all - ensures applicants get a corporate response from the whole authority - and involves the early consideration of both development neighbours and planning committee members.

Questions	Comments
2.1 Does the MK pre app service deliver - reduced costs to the council at application stage? - fewer refusals and appeals? - early turn away of "no-hope" applications at very low cost for all ? - a corporate response from the whole authority - early consideration of both development neighbours and planning committee members?	- The pre-application process reduces costs by improving efficiency and Officer time spent on applications at full application stage. - Qualitatively, we believe that our pre-application process does result in less refusals, and subsequently appeals, however there is a lack of quantitative evidence to verify this. - We provide firm, clear advice on pre-applications that are unacceptable. - Our pre-application responses deliver advice on the pertinent planning considerations related to the proposed development. This advice is advisory and does not form a corporate response on the acceptability of an application (no licensing consideration or other non-planning related matters). - We do not consult neighbours or committee members on development at pre application stage. However, we draw attention to issues with development that may prompt objections from these parties. We encourage consultation / consultation events via the pre-application process and PPAs.

3. Receipt / validation

Aside from any pre-application advice this is the first encounter that an applicant has with the council. It's important to get it right to start off on the right foot. The validation step is important because it is when 'the clock starts ticking' for measuring 8 and 13 week targets for planning decisions. It is also critical – because it is the moment when the local community and neighbours and members may first find out about the application for development.

High numbers of invalid applications indicates problems with your Validation Check List, or/and your IT and administrative process and represents additional cost to the council and applicants.

A good planning service...	
On declaring applications valid, begins working on them at the earliest opportunity. Does not use the validation process to 'manage' demand. Deals with validation within a few days of receipt (or shorter). Where it has validation 'targets' (e.g. 3 days) it takes care that this approach is not adding unnecessary delay to 'good' applications / or causing other 'perverse' outcomes in order to meet targets. Finds a balance between being helpful and proportionate but without doing rework for agents at public expense. Has clear guidance available and engages proactively with regular applicants to make their expectations and standards clear. Trims its validation requirements to the minimum, really questioning whether an extra set of information will add value to the consideration of the proposal. Applies a risk-based approach to some of the processes for high volume work e.g. minimal validation requirements, no site visits – perhaps linked to an incentive for agents to submit 'good work'. Uses common sense for example if they can see at validation stage that something is unacceptable, will advise applicants at the same time as letting them know about an application being valid/invalid.	
Questions	**Comments**
3.1 Is the local validation list regularly reviewed to make sure that it is relevant and necessary (e.g. Do we use all of the information that we routinely require?), or to look for ways of reducing the amount of information automatically required (e.g. by moving it into a discretionary category?).	We do not have an up to date local validation list (LVL). The new draft LVL is in the process of being consulted on and will then adopted. It is proposed to review it every two years in accordance with the PPG requirements.
3.2 A good registration and validation service is delivered by staff that understands the elements of the local list that are always required, and where they have some flexibility. The opposite can be said of a service where staff rigidly apply the requirements of the local list on all occasions or wilfully apply their 'own' rules based on personal preference. What is your approach?	This is somewhat irrelevant as we do not have a local validation list, however our validation team apply the national validation standards consistently when validating applications. Planning Officers check the validation of each application upon allocation.

3.3 The way that the service is structured and resourced can affect the number of hand-offs, applications queueing and bottlenecks. What have you done to mitigate against this? E.g. do registration / validation staff process applications through to decision? Do planners register and validate their own cases?	- There are only two hand-offs within the process- these are between validation and the planning officer once an application has been made valid, and then between the planning officer and the sign-off officer once the planning officer has made their recommendation. However, after validation the planning officer takes responsibility for the case throughout its lifetime, unless it is reallocated. - We monitor validation daily. - Sign-off resource was reduced to a single officer in the wake of the Blakelands decision to ensure accuracy and consistency. This was not sufficient resource to cope with the demand, therefore two additional senior officers were given this task. This resource proved to be unsustainable. More recently, a further two senior officers were given delegated powers to sign off applications and we will continue to monitor this resource.
3.4 Good councils try and prevent validation issues holding things up by working to the minimum legal requirement; phoning or visiting applicants to sort out issues (rather than using a letter or email as the default communication); asking themselves what else can be progressed while waiting for missing information. How closely do you follow these approaches?	- We do not currently have a local list in MKC, however this is currently being developed, meaning application shave to meet the minimum nation validation requirements. - Calls are made to applicants or agents, however as invalidation letters are made to agents/applicants we require the audit trail to confirm the reasons, therefore any calls would be followed up with an email or letter for the case file.

| 3.5 Do you 'performance manage' the validation process? E.g. do you know:

How much works comes in valid and therefore ready to be worked on?
Whether validation is an issue that affects all types of applications or just certain types?
What is the standard time for an invalid application to pass through this stage? | - Yes – validation performance including incoming and processed applications being recorded on a daily basis. Daily emails are also issued to staff advising them of daily turnaround times for validation workloads.

- All application types have minimum requirements for information to be submitted but these vary dependent upon the application type.

- Most applications are made valid within 28 days of additional information being requested, however if they extend beyond 28 days the Council reserves the rights to return invalid applications over 28 days beyond requested information.

- Uniform has graphs which indicate the reasons for invalidation, these reasons can be broken down into per month, per year and annually to allow for analysis. |
| 3.6 Do you regularly review or invite feedback that helps you understand:

What the common validation issues are and the types of application they are associated with?
What problems applicants are having submitting valid applications?
What can be done to help them get it right first time? | - Validation issues log – used by planning officers.

- Training and DM Officer oversight of their process notes.

- Agents Forum

- Local validation list which is being drafted will help set the requirements out clearer for what applicant/agents can be expected to supply with their application to ensure it is made valid. |

4. Consultation – Neighbours/Public; Councillors; Advisors

Consultation (for many applications) is a step required by law. It involves making neighbours; community groups/parish and town councils; local members and statutory consultees aware of the application and then inviting them to make comment on it.

A good planning service...
Uses its Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) to set out its consultation policy and complies with it. Has a checklist that means that decisions about the process of consultation can be taken quickly and consistently.

Works with stakeholders to get timely consultation responses.

Ensures consultees know who the case officer is and have access to them to facilitate discussions. Or has a generic case system that ensure enquires are answered quickly.

Reviews how effective the different consultation methods are and make the most of the more effective methods e.g. many councils are reviewing how they use the media and letters in favour of site notices.

Questions	Comments
4.1 A good consultation process is conducted in plain English and makes it clear what is in or outside scope to change. It is done by staff who understand what is always required and where they have some flexibility. The opposite can be said of a service where consultation is often unclear about the issues at hand and/or that often without good reason goes beyond the requirement of the Law, perhaps due to staff applying their 'own' rules. How would you describe your approach?	- The Council's consultation requirements are informed by national legislation and ratified by councilors. - Case Officers double check the consultations and site notices that have been generated by validation and amend accordingly. - As part of the recent process review, we have reviewed the consultation requirements and have increased consistency as a result. - Refresher' training on consultation requirements periodically.
4.2 Are the results of consultation shared with applicants and the community immediately? It can play a part in reducing the need for conditions if an applicant has time to consider and respond to issues identified.	- Results of consultations are shared with applicants and the community via public access. - We proactively email consultee comments onto the applicant as and when it is appropriate.
4.3 Do you understand what consultees are typically concerned about, and when they get concerned? Most of the time you'll be consulting the same consultees about the same things; a little understanding on both sides can help to anticipate and address issues earlier and more proactively, and should lead to better and more timely responses.	Yes, agreed. We understand what neighbours and consultees are usually concerned about. Further, we actively promote the pre-application process which helps to address issues early and proactively.

4.4 Consultees (including statutory ones) can represent a risk and a bottleneck to planning decisions. Do officers work proactively and engage with consultees on concerns prior to producing the committee report?	- Officers engage with consultees throughout the application process, ahead of writing delegated or committee reports. However, if the consultees have fundamental, valid issues with the application then rather than 'engage' with consultees we will refuse the application. In regard to neighbour responses, any comments received will be addressed within the delegated / committee report. It is not general practice to respond to individual neighbour comments and this is reflected in the residents' notification letter.
4.5 Do you have measures or processes in place that allow you to understand how much time and resources are spent on consultation?	None in place, varies on a case by case basis. Would be useful to undertake a PAS style survey monitoring time to form the basis of an average day/week/month/quarter on this.
4.6 Do you have any feedback mechanisms that allow you find out what consultees say about your approach to consultation?	- There are no formal feedback mechanisms for internal consultees. In terms of feedback for external consultees there are, similarly, no formal feedback mechanisms- however, we would hope that these parties would get in touch with us directly if they wished to provide feedback. - draw attention to surveys at committee (see section 1.4).

5. Consideration – Planning Application Assessment – Allocation to officers, Case Assessment and Consultations Assessment

A good planning service...

Has a flexible and proportionate approach: many councils go through a standardised approach for every application e.g. visiting the site and considering the application against a wide range of issues. This is because of a perceived need to be "bullet proof" against challenge.

Knows the issues that are regularly the subject of negotiation and considers whether particular policies (e.g. viability) are causing trouble without benefit.

Works with applicants (avoiding where possible quick refusals) when problems occur or revisions are required to the application and only refuse schemes that are clearly unacceptable and not fixable. Note that quick refusals can lead to "free go" applications.

Only use extension of time agreements and planning performance agreements when appropriate; not as a default way of bypassing NI targets.

Works with other parts of the service or council to ensure a co-ordinated and joined up approach.

Crucially has respect for the "consultation process" and ensures relevant planning matters are carefully taken into account

Employs case officers who are regularly trained to deal with planning applications and decision making criteria.

Questions	Comments
5.1 What criteria do you use to decide on whether a site visit is necessary on an application? Are there alternatives (e.g. Google Earth or similar, or applicant photos?).	The current practice is normally to undertake a site visit on all applications other than certificate of lawfulness applications for proposed development and householder applications without objections. However, officers also use google earth/ street view and GIS aerial photographs. We are reviewing our processes with regards to undertaking site visits. ACTION From 01.08.2019 all site visits to be logged onto uniform system.
5.2 Do you have an early triage process that makes a decision about whether an application will ultimately get there or whether the kindest approach is a quick refusal? Do planners feel able to ask for help or a second opinion?	Officers carry out early informal assessments on the merits of each case when they receive valid applications. Amendments are only asked for when the amendments are minor and would not require re-consultation, otherwise a timely decision is made as soon as possible. Yes, planners use peer review meetings (fortnightly), allocated mentor meetings and open door policy to discuss and also ask for assistance when needed.

5.3 Do you work with consultees to understand if there are issues that are typically/regularly the subject of negotiation so that you can address these concerns specifically?	Yes, case officers learn from experience about what different consultees will raise. This allows them to inform applicants of what consultees will raise. Training with consultees allows discussion on these issues.
5.4 How closely do you work with other parts of the service (e.g. policy, design, enforcement, heritage) to look at opportunities to address issues that regularly occur as sticking points in negotiations?	Very closely, both on an adhoc basis and during weekly consultee surgeries.
5.5 How is time managed at this stage e.g. is there a process that prompts for action on cases that are about to 'expire'? How 'old' are cases once they get in front of an officer?	There is a prompt within the uniform system and all officers have their own caseload spreadsheet. Managers manage application performance by going through 7&8 weeker (expiring) cases with officers on a weekly basis as well as keeping an eye on overall caseload numbers and agreeing re-allocations. This is dependent on the speed of validation by the technical team.
5.6 How do you ensure that extensions of time and planning performance agreements are used properly i.e. in cases that genuinely need more time to approve?	Extensions of time are agreed with/by managers. PPAs are only agreed for more complex cases where performance management and a bespoke timetable, agreed prior to submission, but subject to review, is required.
5.7 Do you carry out any performance management of this part of the process to understand volumes and where problems might be focused? e.g. Volume of free goes per application type Volume of withdrawn applications per type Volume of open applications per officer	Yes, open applications per officer are regularly monitored by case officers. Numbers of withdrawn and free go applications have not been regularly monitored, but the information is available.
5.8 When a case is controversial and the planning balance fine how does a Cttee report get signed off and how is the planning balanced judged before it gets to Cttee?	All committee and panel reports are cleared by managers only and legal officers before being published.

6. The Report

There is no requirement for a report on a planning application, although reports can be used as a "dry run" for the requirements of the decision notice. This is a very useful area to focus on as it will increase capacity. Equally on controversial applications neighbours, the community and members like to see a report in order to understand the "planning balance" behind the recommendation. Reports should properly consider all relevant consultation responses.

A good planning service...
Thinks about the audience and the purpose of the report (delegated, committee) and adjusts the content accordingly. Ensures that reports set out the decision-making logic, accepting that these can vary widely in length, detail and approach depending on the complexity of the application. Even so, still make sure that the report is clear, focussed and relevant. Is aware of risk and challenges to decisions.

Questions	Comments
6.1 Who decides what form a report should take and how long it should be? What criteria are these decisions based on?	There is a scheme of delegation that sets out whether an application is called in to committee. A report is completed on a standard template, depending on the application type. Officers assess applications in as much detail as necessary to fully justify their recommendation.
6.2 Is there inconsistency among officers e.g. do different officers follow different rules (for the same types of cases)?	The template is the same, but each officer is free to write their report in their own style capturing the material planning considerations.
6.3 Report templates are often tweaked as a result of a perceived gap in a particular case. They can become longer and longer over time and represent a burden to everyone. When were they last critically appraised?	Committee reports were last reviewed in May/ June 2019. Delegated reports were last reviewed in April 2019.
6.4 Are officers clear about what the reports are for? Who the audience is? And do reports have any subsequent use?	Officers are aware that their report is justification for their recommendation. They are aware that they have multiple audiences, including councilors, members of the public and the sign off officer. They are also aware that they could be used for future appeals or subsequent planning applications on the site, etc.

6.5 Do you ask councillors for their views on committee reports – are they meeting the needs of the committee?	The chair of DCC has been involved in the recent committee report review. Members also provide their feedback at committee briefing and occasionally after the committee meeting. Councilors do not see individual reports prior to being published.

7. The Decision (Delegated)

Decisions are made by a Planning Authority. In practise almost all decisions are made by planning officers under delegated powers, leaving a few important, strategic or especially contentious applications for planning committee.

A good planning service...	
Has a clearly understood and accepted delegated agreement that enables decisions to be taken at the right level. Is clear about the purpose of every single report, and tailor the task according to its audience and risk profile. Makes sure that the reasons for the decision are clear and well communicated.	
Questions	**Comments**
7.1 How do you make sure that the triggers for call-in to committee are clear, well communicated and understood, and are regularly reviewed to reflect the needs and priorities of planning in your place?	The triggers for call-in are within the Scheme of Delegation which has been clearly communicated to parish councils, councillors and officers and is available on the Milton Keynes Council website. The Scheme of Delegation was last reviewed in 2016 and is revised when necessary.
7.2 Good planning committees spend their time on important work. How do you make sure that the right work is getting in front of them?	The Council has approved a wide ranging Scheme of Delegation which ensures that the majority of cases are dealt with under delegated powers and only the applications that are required to be heard by committee are heard by the planning committee. Officers, where possible, look to address issues that can avoid the request for an application to be heard by committee (for example Parish Council objections) so it can agreed by relevant parties that it can be dealt with as a delegated decision where appropriate.
7.3 Have you considered alternative ways of getting a political steer on applications that is short of being called-in by committee?	All Council members receive the weekly list of applications. All Ward Councillors are notified of applications in their ward and officers discuss these applications with Councillors where necessary, to understand their concerns and mitigate the need for applications to be called-in where these concerns can be addressed. Developers for major schemes are encouraged to notify and engage with Ward Councillors and Parish Councils during the pre-application stage to resolve any concerns prior to submitting an application.

7.4 Are there any measures in place to help you understand and manage the work of the committee e.g. Count of applications going to committee Time taken for committee to make decisions (cf deferrals) Counts of overturns	The upcoming items for committee are monitored through the draft agenda spreadsheet by the development management team. Statistics for committee including overall figures of applications going to committee, time taken and counts of overturns are not monitored by development management however this information is available if required.
7.5 Are there any processes in place to get feedback e.g. What do committee members say about how committee is serviced by officers? Do your customers understand your decisions?	Feedback to officers is regularly given by the Chair at committee briefing. Councillors occasionally provide feedback at the end of committee meetings. Regular meetings are held with officers and councillors to provide customer service feedback. Positive feedback has recently been received from councillors. The issues on each case are set out in the officers report and then debated at length by members as part of the meeting and therefore in a public forum. The decisions made on applications are clearly articulated by the Chair at committee meetings. Feedback is provided by agents through the Agents Forum. ACTION: public feedback questionnaire is being proposed (See section 1.4).

8. The Decision (Committee)

Decisions are made by a Planning Authority. In practise almost all decisions are made by planning officers under delegated powers, leaving a few important, strategic or especially contentious applications for planning committee.

A good planning service...	
Has a clearly understood and accepted delegated agreement that enables decisions to be taken at the right level. Is clear about the purpose of every single report, and tailor the task according to its audience and risk profile. Makes sure that the reasons for the decision are clear and well communicated.	
Questions	**Comments**
8.1 How do you make sure that the triggers for call-in to committee are clear, well communicated and understood, and are regularly reviewed to reflect the needs and priorities of planning in your place?	The triggers for call-in are within the Scheme of Delegation which has been clearly communicated to parish councils, councillors and officers and is available on the Milton Keynes Council website. The Scheme of Delegation was last reviewed in 2016 and is revised when necessary.
8.2 Good planning committees spend their time on important work. How do you make sure that the right work is getting in front of them?	The Council has approved a wide ranging Scheme of Delegation which ensures that the majority of cases are dealt with under delegated powers and only the applications that are required to be heard by committee are heard by the planning committee. Officers, where possible, look to address issues that can avoid the request for an application to be heard by committee (for example Parish Council objections) so it can agreed by relevant parties that it can be dealt with as a delegated decision where appropriate.
8.3 Have you considered alternative ways of getting a political steer on applications that is short of being called-in by committee?	All Council members receive the weekly list of applications. All Ward Councillors are notified of applications in their ward and officers discuss these applications with Councillors where necessary, to understand their concerns and mitigate the need for applications to be called-in where these concerns can be addressed. Developers for major schemes are encouraged to notify and engage with Ward Councillors and Parish Councils during the pre-application stage to resolve any concerns prior to submitting an application.

8.4 Are there any measures in place to help you understand and manage the work of the committee e.g. Count of applications going to committee Time taken for committee to make decisions (cf deferrals) Counts of overturns	The upcoming items for committee are monitored through the draft agenda spreadsheet by the development management team. Statistics for committee including overall figures of applications going to committee, time taken and counts of overturns are not monitored by development management however this information is available if required.
8.5 Are there any processes in place to get feedback e.g. What do committee members say about how committee is serviced by officers? Do your customers understand your decisions?	Feedback to officers is regularly given by the Chair at committee briefing. Councillors occasionally provide feedback at the end of committee meetings. Regular meetings are held with officers and councillors to provide customer service feedback. Positive feedback has recently been received from councillors. The issues on each case are set out in the officers report and then debated at length by members as part of the meeting and therefore in a public forum. The decisions made on applications are clearly articulated by the Chair at committee meetings. Feedback is provided by agents through the Agents Forum.

9. The Decision Notice (and legal agreement)

A good planning service...
Aims to issue a 'shovel-ready' permission so minimises later work e.g. pre-commencement conditions; recognises the cost to applicants and risks to development of these conditions.

Minimises the number of conditions to those that are essential.

Has already discussed with applicants the conditions required and has agreed Heads of Terms for legal agreements.

Minimises jargon to the legal minimum and makes sure that the decision is clear and well communicated

Keeps up to date with the requirements of the DMPO; many people's knowledge is out of date.

Questions	**Comments**
9.1 What is in place to ensure the correct DN is issued after a delegated or Cttee decision?	Following the Blakelands case, the process of issuing a decision notice was reviewed and is now as below: For delegated decisions, the sign-off officer reviews and agrees the report, the recommendation and conditions/ reasons for refusal. Once sign off officers are content to sign off a recommendation steps are in place to preview the decision notice before it is issued to ensure that all of the officer's recommended conditions/ refusal reasons are on the decision notice. For committee decisions, the case officer checks the recommendation and conditions that they have inputted into the system based on the committee report, update paper and decision sheet that is filled in at committee (that notes any additional changes to conditions or reasons for refusal and whether the decision has been overturned and the subsequent conditions or reasons that are applied by the members' resolution). The sign-off officer checks the report and decision as above to ensure accuracy and preview the decision as they would a delegated decision. In both cases, once the decision notice has been generated, there is an opportunity to double check the notice before it is emailed to the agent and published, if necessary.

9.2 A decision notice can be attacked in various ways. Permissions can be JR'd, and refusals appealed. These represent risks to the council, but how often do they happen and is the 'bullet-proofing' proportionate?	JRs are extremely rare. We monitor appeals to decisions including the outcome. These are reported to committee with a summary of the Inspector's comment. It is not understood what is meant by 'is the bullet-proofing proportionate'.
9.3 Performance – do you count the number of pre-start conditions you issue?	The number of pre-commencement conditions is not monitored, however, these are applied in accordance with the national guidance (ie. Agreeing these with the applicant/ agent prior to being applied). They are avoided wherever possible and other triggers are used where appropriate.
9.4 Are there any processes in place to get feedback from customers about their experience and understanding e.g. do your customers understand your decisions?	Customers are able to provide feedback (compliments, complaints and comments) directly to case officers or through the Council website. ACTION: public feedback questionnaire is being proposed.

10. Monitoring and Achieving Quality
After the decision notice, good councils monitor and learn about their work.

A good planning service...
Takes the planning committees on post-decision site visits to see how schemes turned out and to assess particular issues that they'd considered or acted on.
Ensures its planning officers can continue to "own" the development and deal with any problems or questions as they arise.
Monitor what doesn't start on site, and works with land owners and developers to resolve any planning related reasons for delays.
Has a well-resourced enforcement service that can help with monitoring and then enforcement breaches, and works to an enforcement plan.

Questions	Comments
10.1 How does the service monitor and learn from what developments get built?	The service currently monitors statistical data on permitted residential and employment development in terms of the amount, and type of development, started and completed per quarter. This is collected by conducting site visits every quarter. This data is used to analyze delivery rates and to inform the Council's housing trajectory and five-year land supply position, as well as assisting in preparing local planning policy and strategy. The service is also currently reviewing the wider monitoring processes it undertakes following the adoption of Plan:MK, which contains a new monitoring framework to monitor the delivery and implementation of the policies contained within it. An Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) will be produced every year which will analyse and report on the performance of Plan:MK policies. ACTION: potential for setting up and undertaking periodical officers' reviews and members' tours of completed schemes to learn lessons

10.2 How does the service monitor and learn from schemes that do not get built or have stalled?	The service monitors the progression of all major residential and employment developments which have been granted permission, as outlined in Question 10.1. With regards to large and strategic developments, where monitoring data shows these are not progressing, further information is sought on why so as to ascertain what actions the planning service, or wider Council, may be able to take to assist delivery. The service has also produced a Housing Delivery Action Plan which incorporates a number of objectives, including monitoring based objectives, aimed at ensuring the Borough's housing requirement is met on an annual basis. This action plan is reviewed on an annual basis so as to consider and implement new actions that may be required. Furthermore a Plan:MK Delivery Board has been set-up to monitor and report on delivery throughout the year and to consider actions and initiatives to address underperformance.
10.3 Lots of quality assessment is focused on finding problems or mistakes. Does the council notice and celebrate success?	There is currently no process for post-decision assessment of completed developments. ACTION: potential for setting up and undertaking periodical officers' reviews and members' tours of completed schemes to learn lessons

10.4 Is there an agreed enforcement plan that sets out and explains how enforcement is targeted and prioritised?	There are three main documents that constitute Milton Keynes enforcement policy. The Milton Keynes Local Planning Enforcement Plan sets out the framework for how planning enforcement investigations should be conducted and includes a guide to response times and how we prioritise complaints. The enforcement guide is a guide to the Local enforcement plan and explains how we investigate our complaints and sets out response targets and explains how we prioritise complaints. The enforcement policy sets out the general principles of enforcement policy for Milton Keynes council this includes the scope and aims of enforcement and the potential actions and recovery of costs.
10.5 How well is enforcement resourced e.g. do resources reflect the priority?	Planning enforcement covers a wide remit of potential breaches of planning control because of this wide ranging remit resources need to be allocated accordingly when there are planning investigations that require specific and special attention. This can on occasion require officers to be redirected from the lower priority but still important reported alleged breaches of control.
10.6 Do you monitor complaints and record feedback from customers (e.g. using surveys)?	Complaints are monitored on a daily basis. All complaints are followed through until a resolution / response to the complainant. We follow the Customer Service KPI dates in which to respond. A survey is included with the correspondence to the claimant, Customer Services send a monthly report to the Senior Management Team noting any feedback received. ACTION: public feedback questionnaire is being proposed.

Objective 1: Development and maintenance of robust and effective processes

Action	Priority[9]	Resource requirement[10]	Timescale	Lead Officer[11]	Other Stakeholders[12]
a) Review and adapt pre-application and PPA process and develop appropriate process map and procedure note	High	Medium	Short	DM Team Leader	DM Manager / Head of Planning
b) Prepare and adopt a Local Validation List (LVL)	High	Low	Short	DM Team Leader	DM Manager
c) Review and adapt inclusion of standard conditions	High	Medium	Medium	DM Manager	DM Team Leader / Head of Planning
d) Review and adapt validation process map and procedure note	High	Low	Short	Technical Planning Manager	DM Manager / DM Team Leader / Head of Planning
e) Review and adapt s106 process map and procedure note	High	Medium	Short	Infrastructure Policy and Programme Manager	DM Manager / Head of Planning
f) Review and adapt enforcement process map and procedure note	High	Medium	Short	Senior Enforcement Officer	DM Manager / Head of Planning / Legal team
g) Review and adapt appeals process map and procedure note	High	Low	Short	DM Team Leader	DM Manager / Head of Planning
h) Review and adapt process for preparation and review of DCC/DCP reports*	Medium	Low	Short	DM Manager	DM Team Leader / Head of Planning
i) Review and adapt process for undertaking and recording site visits*	High	Low	Short	DM Manager	

Action	Priority[9]	Resource requirement[10]	Timescale	Lead Officer[11]	Other Stakeholders[12]
j) Undertake monthly monitoring checks of DM processes	Medium	Medium	Short	DM Manager / Technical Planning Manager	

* Action completed and transferred to business as usual

Objective 2: Retention of workforce capacity and developed capability

Action	Priority[9]	Resource requirement[10]	Timescale	Lead Officer[11]	Other Stakeholders[12]
a) Review resources and skills within the service	High	Medium	Medium	Head of Planning	DM Manager
b) Monitor weekly performance statistics*	High	Medium	Short	DM Team Leader	DM Manger / Technical Planning Manager
c) Prepare library of training materials for officers and Councillors	Medium	High	Long	DM Team	
d) Briefing to DCC members on roles and responsibilities and training for committee chairs	Medium	Low	Medium	Democratic Services	Head of Planning / DM Manager
e) Prepare service training plan	High	Low	Short	Business Improvement Manager	Head of Planning
f) Support officers to obtain professional qualification*	Medium	High	Short	DM manager	Head of Planning

* Action completed and transferred to business as usual

Objective 3: Reliable IT systems that respond effectively to customer demand

Action	Priority[9]	Resource requirement[10]	Timescale	Lead Officer[11]	Other Stakeholders[12]
a) Review in-team IT management resource	High	Medium	Medium	Head of Planning	
b) Regular updating of Planning webpages to include a full annual audit	High	High	Long	DM Team Leaders	
c) Develop programme of improvements for Uniform and Public Access DM Portal	High	High	Medium	Technical Planning Manager	DM Manager

Objective 4: To be recognised by stakeholders and customers as a professional and high performing service that responds effectively to feedback

Action	Priority[11]	Resource requirement[12]	Timescale	Lead Officer[13]	Other Stakeholders[14]
a) Prepare a communications plan to report on service improvements and performance	High	Medium	Short	DM Manager	Head of Planning / Communications Team / Portfolio Holder
b) Communicate on key performance indicators*	High	Low	Short	Technical Planning Manager	DM Manager / Head of Planning
c) Review DCC/DCP decisions made contrary to recommendation*	Medium	Medium	Short	DM Team Leaders	Technical Planning Manager
d) Develop strong relationships with Town/Parish Councils*	High	High	Short	DM Manager / Head of Planning	DM Team
e) Develop and deliver training to DCC	High	High	Short	DM Manager / DM Team Leaders	Head of Planning / Legal / Placemaking
f) Undertake annual workshop to reflect on DCC performance	High	Low	Medium	DM Manager	Head of Planning
g) Undertake stakeholder feedback survey	Medium	Medium	Medium	Technical Planning Manager	Head of Planning / Communications Team
h) Review the DM Customer Charter	High	Medium	Long	DM Manager	Head of Planning
i) Review the enforcement guide and plan	High	Medium	Medium	Senior Enforcement Officer	DM Manager

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[11] Indication of the level of priority attached to the action given the benefits to service delivery
[12] Indication of the level of resource (financial or officer time) that would be required to deliver the action (high, medium, low)
[13] Lead officer(s) within the Planning Service that are responsible for taking forward delivery of the action
[14] Other stakeholders that have been identified as providing support in the delivery of the action

Action	Priority[11]	Resource requirement[12]	Timescale	Lead Officer[13]	Other Stakeholders[14]
j) Arrange bi-annual agents and consultee forums	Medium	Low	Medium	DM Manager	Head of Planning
h) Arrange monthly liaison meetings with MKC consultees*	High	Low	Short	DM Manager	Head of Planning

* Action completed and transferred to business as usual