

CABINET MEMBER FOR PLANNING POLICY & CITY DEVELOPMENT

RECORD OF DECISIONS of the meeting of the Cabinet Member for Planning Policy & City Development held on Wednesday, 19 July 2023 at 4.00 pm at the Guildhall, Portsmouth

Present

Councillor Hugh Mason (in the Chair)

Councillors Matthew Atkins
Raymond Dent
George Fielding

Also in attendance:

Councillor Judith Smyth

8. Apologies for absence

There were none.

9. Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

10. Update of Development Management Performance

The report was introduced by Ian Maguire, Assistant Director Regeneration, who informed members that the general position was set out in the graphs on pages 6 and 7 of the agenda pack. He noted that his letter of response to the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities which was attached to the report (as Appendix C), provided further information requested by the Secretary of State on the potential designation of the Council for the speed of decision making. He informed Members that Portsmouth had invited the Planning Advisory Service to review performance and support service improvement and that highlighted some useful context that reiterates the exceptional circumstances highlighted in the previous report in February 2023.

In response to members questions, it was clarified that:

- While overall performance has improved to above the required 70% threshold this has been achieved through use of overtime and Saturday working and by compromising on quality and customer service.
- It is likely that performance levels above 70% can be maintained as new staff are being recruited at all levels though posts for senior planners with 7-10 years of experience remain unfilled. This is an issue for many councils and is not easily resolved due to difficulties of introducing specialist pay grades.

- Once new staff have been recruited and trained attention will turn towards regaining previous, high quality and customer service levels.
- There is further work to be done on applications relating to Houses of Multiple Occupancy (HMO's) and this relates to the Scheme of Delegation and the interpretation of the Council's Constitution.
- Of the 12 HMO applications considered by the Planning Committee at its last meeting, 6 would have been on the agenda because of objections or other member referrals.
- The Idox Uniform system is a back office document and case management system used across regulatory services in the council. It is coming to the end of its life and is likely to be replaced in the next two years.

Members comments:

Councillor Judith Smyth noted that she believed it would be useful for the Planning Committee to consider how HMOs are dealt with when applications are clearly within standards guidance.

Councillor Matthew Atkins commented that consideration of whether an application is referred to the Planning Committee should be based on individual merit and in consultation with residents rather than as a class.

Councillor Hugh Mason commented that he would seek a meeting with the Chair of the Planning Committee to discuss the process of dealing with HMO applications as a class, noting that this may have been appropriate in the past but that generally the quality of applications had improved. He confirmed that he had concerns about the impact on officer time adding that bringing HMOs to Committee as a class also had an impact on Member's ability to focus on design, location, use of buildings etc. and that he would report back at the next meeting.

Members present thanked Mr Maguire and his team for the report and the significant improvements in Development Performance already made.

DECISIONS - that the information report be noted.

The meeting concluded at 4.46 pm.

Councillor Hugh Mason
Chair