Planning Service Fundamental Service Review

Recommendation to Committee:
That the Committee reviews and comments on the proposed scope of the Planning Service Fundamental Service Review and nominates a maximum of four councillors to join the Fundamental Service Review (FSR) Board.

Reason for Recommendation:
In order to ensure the Committee's involvement in the fundamental service review process, the scope of the review is endorsed and support given so that the appropriate resources are in place to undertake the review successfully within the agreed timescale.

1. Executive summary

1.1 An effective Planning Service will be at the forefront of shaping the character, development and prosperity of the borough in the future and it is important that the Council ensure the service is fit for the future to meet both statutory requirements and to support corporate priorities.

1.2 This report outlines the scope of the fundamental service review (FSR) of the Council's Planning Service to ensure a cost effective, efficient, and quality service.

1.3 In October 2012, the Executive approved an FSR process framework and agreed a programme of reviews covering a range of Council services, including Development Control and Building Control. At that time, a number of reviews were underway in the Planning Service; these are outlined in section three of this report.
1.4 Due to these previous reviews, the Planning Service wanted to ensure that there was sufficient benefit to be gained in conducting a fundamental service review at this time so a feasibility study was commissioned.

1.5 This feasibility study has concluded that there is sufficient benefit as there are a number of significant issues that remain unresolved, opportunities to be explored, as well as certain functions within the service that have not been subject to previous fundamental reviews.

1.6 This report provides a summary of these benefits and therefore concentrates on the improvement opportunities. It does not attempt to provide a full detailed service assessment and therefore does not include the many positive elements of the service such as strong performance on appeal, no ombudsman complaints for many years and the effective resolution of many aging enforcement cases.

1.7 The fundamental service review of the Planning Service will consolidate all review recommendations and ongoing initiatives in one place; incorporating Development Control (including Planning Committee), Building Control, Planning Policy, support services and Local Land Charges.

1.8 This feasibility study has provided a greater level of understanding of improvement priorities to enable the FSR Board to more quickly focus on scrutinising certain aspects of service improvements and options appraisal that will lead to the development of a service implementation plan.

1.9 Engagement and communication with staff is critical to the success of the review. Planning Service teams will be involved during the review phases shown in section 6.2 of this report.

2. Strategic priorities

2.1 The FSR programme is a key area of activity of the theme ‘Developing your Council’ outlined in the Council’s Corporate Plan.

2.2 Improving value for money and efficiency in service delivery to our customers is the guiding priority of the FSR programme.

2.3 One of the key strategic priorities for Guildford over the next few years is the delivery of a new Local Plan to enable good development to help drive economic prosperity. This review is therefore timely to ensure the Planning Service can rise to the challenges this will bring.

3. Background

3.1 The FSR framework was adopted to ensure a managed, robust and consistent approach to service reviews across the Council. This is a key element to ensure efficiency and effectiveness of the services we provide. The framework also provides greater and more structured involvement of the Council’s scrutiny committees in the fundamental review of our services.

3.2 The Executive approved the schedule of service reviews on 4 October 2012. Since this time, we have completed fundamental service reviews for Street Cleansing, Office Services and Bereavement Services, with Parking Services now underway.
The FSR programme aims to ensure that we concentrate on the service areas that offer the greatest opportunity and potential benefit to our customers and the Council.

3.3 When the programme commenced in 2012, a review of Development Control and Planning Committee by Trevor Roberts Associates had been completed with reviews of both Planning Enforcement, through the Councillor Enforcement task and finish group, and Building Control underway. Following these reviews, a number of issues were raised highlighting opportunities for change and improvements in a number of key areas of the service. Work to address the 34 recommendations relating to the Planning Committee was considered and a report to full Council in April 2014 progressed two of these recommendations. Work relating to 19 of the 34 Development Control recommendations has been progressed.

3.4 The Enforcement task and finish group also identified some improvement opportunities and an action plan was produced with several of the actions now implemented.

3.5 There have been other earlier reviews that have covered specific aspects of the service outlined below.

- Tree Preservation Orders.
- Section 106 Lean review - actions are on hold due to Community Infrastructure Levy.
- Land Charges - this resulted in the function being transferred from Legal Services into the Planning Service.
- Development Control administration review.
- Conservation Team review.
- Development Control structure review.
- Environmental Projects review.

3.6 The service has been subject to regular challenge due to changing demands placed by the Government's planning and building standards modernisation agenda and secondly through the Council's own improvement programmes. Furthermore, the Government has identified the planning process as being key to facilitating sustainable economic growth.

3.7 The Planning Service in recent years has worked to embed a culture of continuous improvement. A number of significant changes and improvements have been implemented as shown below, while continuing to provide good customer service during an unsettling time.

- Improved signposting and support to customers to increase the electronic submission of planning and building control applications. Over 70 per cent of planning applications and many appeals are now being submitted online.
- Implementation of Public Access with over 284,000 searches since October 2013.
- The new Enterprise system for Building Control that now provides real time data on applications.
- Good performance in the quality of planning decisions with 40 planning appeal decisions so far this year and 35 won.
- DC performance exceeding the thresholds for poor performing authorities.
- BC customer satisfaction feedback rated at over 91%
Recent awards received such as South East LABC Building Excellence award for Building Control and the 2012 Local Data Land Charges award, receiving best performance in the National Land Information Service level two, together with the reaccreditation for Building Control through ISO quality assurance.

The significant research, consultation and development work undertaken by the Policy Team to produce the first draft Local Plan

3.8 The FSR provides an opportunity to build on the work already undertaken and accelerate the process of change and improvement. It is now considered the most appropriate time to consolidate all findings from the earlier reviews and draw on the Planning Service teams’ insight, knowledge and capability to identify how resources, processes and structures of the whole Planning Service could change to better support the strategic priorities and objectives of the Council.

4. **Feasibility Review**

4.1 Alexander consultants were engaged in late April 2014 to undertake a feasibility study to determine whether there was sufficient justification to undertake a fundamental service review and if so, to produce an informed and focussed scope including a new vision for the service. These are detailed in the following sections.

**Method**

4.2 This review has focussed primarily on the largest function within the Service, Development Control as it has most potential to impact on service delivery and has been subject to the majority of previous attention. It is important to ensure that there was remaining sufficient scope for future improvement.

4.3 In addition, Building Control, Planning Committee and Enforcement functions have been assessed at a high level for improvement potential.

4.4 The Planning Policy team was excluded due to current pressures relating to the Local Plan but on the understanding that they would be fully included in any subsequent review.

4.5 Insight and conclusions were gained from the following perspectives:

- an assessment of the status of previous review projects and recommendations, including Trevor Roberts, to identify remaining opportunities to progress
- interviews conducted with stakeholders to understand what they think about the current service, positive and negative and what they want and need from the service
- cost, time and quality of current service benchmarked against other local authorities to indicate opportunities for improvement and provide further context for stakeholder views.

**Outputs**

4.6 The development of a service vision. Using this insight a vision for the service has been developed and a number of priority areas identified to define this scope. This vision is attached in Appendix 1 to this report.
4.7 Priority areas for improvement.

- While service managers recognise there are opportunities to improve and modernise there is a difference in the level of aspiration and drive for change between them and senior officers and councillors. Previous reviews have not been either challenging or not fully implemented. Successful delivery of the vision will require unity.
- The Policy Team needs to evolve and become more embedded within the wider Council, particularly as the Local Plan moves towards adoption and delivery.
- The working relationship between officers and councillors is at times under strain. Committee reports and supporting material quality and style contribute to this.
- Development Control and Enforcement activities in comparison with other local authorities show potential for streamlining and delivering quicker processing. Stakeholder and applicant or agent interviews provided some negative feedback for Development Control. There is a need to embed a responsive and consistent approach to customer care.
- The performance management regime is not responsive enough at times to respond to emerging process and quality issues. Key to this will be focusing in real time on critical measures, encouraging empowerment and embracing a culture of continuous improvement.
- The Building Control review in 2011 did not appraise alternative models of delivery. The FSR now presents an opportunity to consider all service options to further modernise and commercialise the service.
- There are specialist support functions such as graphics and system administrator that are within the service but not replicated in all other council services.

5. Scope

5.1 It is crucial that, at the outset, the terms and scope of the review are clear. The review will cover all functions within the Planning Service in timed phases. It will incorporate the findings from the review work previously undertaken:

- **Development Control**, including Conservation and Enforcement. The review will consolidate the work previously undertaken by Trevor Roberts Associates, current consultancy projects and the Planning Enforcement Task Group activities.
- **Planning Committee**, focussing on working relationships between officers and councillors, the process for referral and the supporting reports and presentation.
- **Building Control**, to consider the outputs from the internal review carried out in 2011.
- **Planning Policy Team**, will consider the timing to include the policy team to ensure that the review does not have a detrimental impact on the work to develop the Council’s new Local Plan.
- **Local Land Charges**
- **Supporting roles** including all administration and central support activities, as well as specialist roles including IT and Graphics
- **Management**

The structure of the service is attached at Appendix 2 to this report.
6. **Boundaries, methodology and timetable**

6.1 An outline of the phases of the review is set out below; a more detailed plan and review timetable will be produced at the start of the FSR. It is likely that a monthly meeting of the FSR Board will be required to check and monitor progress against the plan, together with providing challenge to the outputs from the individual phases of the review as described. It is intended that some elements of each phase will run in parallel to make the best use of resources and to complete the review within a reasonable timescale. Due to the complexities, scale and resource dependencies, within both the Planning Service and other areas to support and manage the project, it is anticipated that the work will not be completed before mid December 2014.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phases</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All of the review phases below will include an assessment of process,</td>
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<tr>
<td>policy, structures, behaviours, performance management, use of technology,</td>
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<td>skills and resource requirements.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 Development Control: Lean detailed analysis and potential for redesign</td>
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<tr>
<td>committee processes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 Policy Team: Lean detailed analysis and potential for redesign with</td>
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<tr>
<td>emphasis on structure and working practices to meet future evolving</td>
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<td>needs.</td>
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<td>3 Councillors and Planning Committee: Work with councillors to define</td>
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<td>value-adding aspects as a key input to the redesign of application,</td>
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<tr>
<td>conservation, enforcement, committee and policy processes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4 Building Control: Lean analysis and potential for redesign of all</td>
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<tr>
<td>functions and processes including Local Land Charges. Full options</td>
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<td>appraisal for alternative delivery models considered alongside theLean</td>
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<td>review.</td>
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<td>5 Other service elements: Lean analysis and potential for redesign of</td>
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<tr>
<td>other service elements such as IT and graphics not included in any of</td>
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<tr>
<td>the above.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6 Final consolidated view on all outputs and consideration of final</td>
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<td>changes and improvement elements to be taken forward for</td>
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<td>implementation as appropriate.</td>
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6.2 It is critical that the Planning Service teams are kept informed and involved as appropriate during all phases of the review. This will ensure that staff have the opportunity to put forward ideas, help shape change and that any improvements or redesign is sustainable from an operational perspective.

6.3 The detailed project plan will need to be carefully designed with Planning Service managers to strike the balance between momentum and ongoing operational work.

6.4 To minimise the risk of impacting on delivery and operation of the service, we will employ a professional consultant to provide additional industry best practice, business process expertise, leadership and capacity to support this review.
7. **Outcomes**

7.1 The review will ensure that the Planning Service is confidently:

- aligned to successfully deliver the Council’s vision for the service
- relevant to the needs of the community which ensures infrastructure requirements delivered alongside the Local Plan
- facilitates economic growth and high quality sustainable development
- has strong relationships with applicants, developers and residents with good customer care
- has streamlined, effective and consistent policies and processes that underpin the Council’s strategic priorities and objectives
- proactive and professional, able to respond quickly to ongoing change
- has an efficient and effective organisational structure supported by effective information systems and meaningful and timely management information
- ensures value for money, contributing to the reduction in the Council’s budget deficit by limiting service costs and increasing income.

8. **Financial Implications**

8.1 There will be costs associated with the employment of consultancy support for this review and we estimate this to be in the region of £50,000. It is our intention that this will be financed from the Invest to Save Fund as we expect this cost to be offset against benefits realised. Procurement of this support will need to be resolved prior to the commencement of the review work.

8.2 Internal resources involved, both within the Planning Service and Corporate Development will be met from existing budgets.

8.3 The options and findings that the review will consider, however, could have the potential for significant financial impacts for the Council. This will be covered in the final review report.

9. **Legal Implications**

9.1 There are no Legal implications arising directly from this report.

9.2 Legal Services will be involved in the review as appropriate that will help identify and manage any legal implications arising. Upon completion of the review, the final report will cover any legal considerations relating to the review implementation plan.

10. **Human Resource Implications**

10.1 There are no Human Resources implications arising directly from this report.

10.2 Any issues that may arise during the review will be referred to HR and will follow all appropriate HR procedures and policies. Upon completion of the review, the final report will cover any HR considerations relating to the review implementation plan.
11. **Key Risks**

- Disruptions within the Planning Service could impact on service delivery and customer satisfaction.
- Staff concern around possible change and uncertainty of the future resulting in lower staff morale and potentially affecting service performance.
- Procurement of consultancy support could delay commencement.
- During the review, the potential to reduce market share for Building Control and Land Charges.
- Availability of resources within Corporate Development to support the review could impact on progress.

12. **Suggested issues for overview and scrutiny**

12.1 The committee is asked to review this report and consider the following questions.

- Do you believe there is sufficient justification for a review of the whole of the Planning Service that will be valuable to residents, councillors, businesses and partners?
- Do you have any comments on the proposed priority areas and scope of this review?
- Do you consider the outline plan for the review to be relevant and achievable?
- How should the membership of the review board reflect both members of the Planning Committee and other councillors?
- Do you have any issues that need to be highlighted for consideration?

13. **Conclusion**

13.1 The Planning Service is a high profile, political and statutory function of the Council. It will be at the forefront of shaping the social, economic and environmental development and prosperity of the Borough. The service has many strengths that can be used as a springboard for further improvement and alignment with the Council’s vision for Planning. It is important that the Council ensure that the Planning Service is fit for the future to meet both statutory requirements and to support strategic priorities and objectives.

14. **Appendices**

Appendix 1 – Planning Service draft vision statement and description
Appendix 2 – Staffing structure chart July 2014
Appendix 1

Draft vision statement: to be an exemplary Planning Service

Description

A Planning Service that is at the centre of delivering the strategic priorities and objectives of the Council. It will be central to improving the built environment and place shaping while respecting Guildford’s unique character and heritage, helping the borough prosper. This will be enabled by working in strong partnership with applicants, agents, communities, members, the Planning Committee, other council services (Legal, Economic Development, Housing) – creating a real sense of one team with a shared set of objectives to manage and enable good development in the Borough through open and constant dialogue.

All applicants and residents will receive a consistent, accessible and responsive service that is sensitive to their needs and pressures be they rural, urban, business or financial. It will be a service that understands and supports them to find ways to achieve sustainable and appropriate development, keeping everyone (including councillors) informed of progress or issues. A service that has a reputation for good customer care and one that is easy to do business with.

A Policy Team that will evolve as all parts of the Local Plan moves in to adoption and then delivery.

All Officers will feel enabled to use their technical expertise to have healthy and constructive debates with both managers and councillors to ensure that policies are pragmatically and consistently applied so that all applicants, and residents feel they are dealing with a single organisation.

Processes will be streamlined, transparent and cost effective allowing officers and managers to use their technical knowledge to maximum effect and rise to the challenges of managing larger scale development that is anticipated in the Borough. This will be enabled by the best structures and leadership that develops and empowers all officers to continuously challenge ways of working, to quickly resolve problems at all levels through visible real-time performance information and responsive process management. Electronic and mobile technology will be embraced to create processes that are efficient, modern and that naturally support effective working practices.

Performance of both officers and processes will be managed focussing on what’s important, delivering good and consistent service to all applicants and residents. This will be facilitated by a framework of skill development to meet minimum requirements and to nurture individuals to create a succession plan to build the strongest team and retain the best talent. Staff will be proud to work in the service and feel appreciated within an energetic and positive work place.