HARROGATE PLANNING PEER REVIEW – SUMMARY OUTCOMES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

THEME 1:   LEADERSHIP AND CORPORATE GOVERNANCE

ELEMENTS	STRENGTHS	AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT	KEY RECOMMENDATIONS IN PEER REVIEW REPORT	UPDATE ON KEY RECOMMENDATIONS
1.1 Vision and direction	• There is recognition from managerial and political leadership of how planning contributes to the council's aims and objectives • The service seeks influence higher-level sub-regional and regional strategies • The LDF is identified as a priority in the corporate plan, and the involvement of key partners and agencies has been sought in its development	• The mission statement and future vision for the service is not clear • The focus to date has been on performance. Whilst performance still needs to be a priority further focus is required on quality, customer service and place shaping	i) Clarify the future role and focus of the planning service at Harrogate and, based on the LDF vision and place shaping ambitions of the council, agree the future resource requirements	The key drivers for this are the Local Government and Planning White Papers which set the context for local public service reform and spatial planning. Senior Members and Officers attended a Spatial Planning Learning Event on 9 November 2007 to increase understanding of the concept of spatial planning and its role in the wider context of ongoing public sector reforms. This event made explicit the role of the LDF as a delivery vehicle to achieve corporate and community objectives and strategies contained in the Local Area Agreement (LAA) and Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS). Further consideration to be given to joint working on SCS and the LDF. There is a need for: • Common vision • Integration • Partnership working • Common consultation and evidence base.

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			ii) Plan now for the future, by corporately discussing and agreeing how the council will respond to identified key risks including the likely RSS housing allocation and PDG exit	Secretary of States response to the Panels report on the examination into the RSS has confirmed the original low figure of 390 housing completions per year to 2025. The LDF Core Strategy has been designed to provide this level of growth and the site allocations (homes and jobs) DPD will identify site allocations to 2020 and the SHLAA will identify a 5 year housing land supply. Subject to these documents progressing through CMPT for consultation and the SHLAA being approved by Council in March 2008 the risks associated with the RSS Housing Allocation are minimal. PDG has ended and a new grant regime is proposed (HPDG). The Government intends to increase planning fees by 25% from April 08. Income from HPDG will be very much reduced from that received under PDG. A significant increase in income is expected from the rise in planning application fees to close the gap. Forward budgets have been prepared on the basis that increased planning fees will balance reduced grant income and sustain the service at its current level of resources.

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1.2 Integration of policy and delivery	• The planning service contributes to the development and review of key policy and strategy via various corporate working groups • Action has been taken to improve linkage between development control and planning policy • There are examples of the planning service working effectively with other services, eg helping to deliver high levels of affordable housing in conjunction with the housing service	• Consider how to further develop the collaboration between planners and the Local Strategic Partnership to ensure that the Community Strategy becomes a "sustainable community strategy" • There is limited evidence of a "gold thread" between the community strategy, corporate plan, and service plans		
1.3 Decision making and scrutiny	• There are mechanisms in place to enable councillor involvement in planning policy development • Councillor/officer relationships are generally viewed as positive and constructive • Training for councillors involved in planning is compulsory	• There appears to be limited engagement of scrutiny in planning policy development and review • Councillor training appears to be light-touch and could be developed further		

THEME 2: CUSTOMER FOCUS AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

ELEMENTS	STRENGTHS	AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT	KEY RECOMMENDATIONS IN PEER REVIEW REPORT	UPDATE ON KEY RECOMMENDATIONS
2.1 Transparency of process for users	• The basis of decision-making is clear, policy focussed and assisted by good visual aids at committee • Information and guidance on the planning process is available online and highly valued by a range of users • The service has a customer charter in place – "Our Service to You"	• The decision-making process is not clearly communicated to all users, in particular that determines what goes to committee, and what doesn't • It is important to ensure that the process and proceedings at committee meetings is explained to those in attendance	iii) Regularly review, improve and develop tailored consultation and engagement opportunities with service users involved in the planning process, including parish councils, and systematically use it to inform service design, delivery and improvement	The current Planning Improvement Plan includes an action to establish an agents Forum. It is the intention to widen the proposed membership of this Forum or create separate Fora representing service users and key stakeholders and in particular develop better joint working with Parish Councils.
2.2 Accessibility	• The SCI sets out the different means of engaging the community and identifies groups that are hard to reach • The Planning Enquiries Team and the duty officer and technician system help increase accessibility to the service • The website has achieved the "Bobby" standard and made good progress against PARSOL	• There is little evidence of diversity issues being integrated into service delivery or strategies • Some customers perceive the service to be inaccessible at times	iv) Further develop and clearly communicate the customer service standards to cover all facets of the planning service – including a more positive approach to pre-application engagement – and regularly monitor performance against them v) Review and refresh the enforcement policy, and ensure the rationale and approach to enforcement is clearly communicated to all service users	Review and expand the planning customer service charter "Our Service to You". Carry forward learning captured at industry training event into pre-application enquires. Capture Best Practice delivered by other LPA's. Review of enforcement policy and service standard currently ongoing in accordance with action in existing Planning Improvement Plan.

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2.3 Responsive-ness to users	• There are some examples of customer feedback being used to shape improvement and change • Customer satisfaction with the planning service is increasing	• The value added by pre-application engagement is not being fully realised and is seen by some officers as a barrier to meeting performance targets • The current approach to pre-application advice is inconsistent and does not meet user expectations • The service to parish councils needs developing further to ensure better responsive news • The resourcing of the enforcement service needs reviewing to meet customer expectations/requirements • The council should consider introducing more forums and mechanisms for listening to service users		

THEME 3: ACHIEVING OUTCOMES EFFECTIVELY AND SUSTAINABLY

ELEMENTS	STRENGTHS	AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT	KEY RECOMMENDATIONS IN PEER REVIEW REPORT	UPDATE ON KEY RECOMMENDATIONS
3.1 Efficient and effective processes	• The levels of officer delegation and a revised committee structure have enabled quicker decision-making • "E-planning" is used to improve efficiency and effectiveness of processes • The planning service has embraced the use of ICT and there is a clear electronic service delivery strategy	• The scheme of delegation is effective but not efficient • There is a need to ensure that the outcomes and added value of changes and improvement activities are clearly understood • There is no systematic review of development outcomes regarding quality and impact • There is a need to further clarify the relationships between front and back office functions to maximise benefits to the service user	vi) Review and amend the scheme of delegation to make it more efficient and effective, so that it places less of a burden on councillor and officer time vii) Ensure that Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD) is developed in relation to all key development issues including sustainable development and renewable energy	Intend to bring forward a report to GP Committee to simplify the scheme of delegation. The timing of this is likely to be coordinated with the introduction of Governments proposals to introduce Local Member Review Bodies to allow Councillors to have the final say on appeals for minor applications decided by Officers under delegated powers. This has implications for the structure of decision taking within the authority. This will be considered in future annual reviews of the Councils Local Development Scheme which is the project plan for the preparation of LDF, DPD's and SPD's.
3.2 Delivering through Partnership working	• There is a recognition of the importance of the AONB and parish councils in the planning process • There are examples of working with public and private sector partners on developments • There are good cross departmental working arrangements and relationships	• There are some perceptions that the AONB is sometimes used to restrict development unreasonably • Inter-departmental working is very dependent on personal relationships • There is scope to develop relationship with parish councils further	viii) Regularly review key activities and processes to ensure an emphasis on achieving quality outcomes, and improve the focus on design quality and sustainability ix) Introduce service level agreements with the service units that provide support/services to the planning function to ensure that level of service is sustained and appropriate to current and future needs	Consider reintroducing the Design Awards scheme focused on sustainable development and the Members Annual Review of completed developments. SLA's are considered a low priority. Resources to sustain the service and to ensure that it is fit for purpose in relation to current and future needs are influenced by the Councils Strategic and Corporate Plan priorities and the allocation of funds through the budget making process. CMPT/HOPS champion the service and negotiate resources.

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3.3 Sustainable stewardship	• There are examples of achieving housing development of a good quality in line with current guidance and in particular with regard to affordable housing • There is a clear policy and approach to Section 106 agreements that secure and maximise community benefits • The council has in-house specialism that adds value to the planning service • SPDs are being developed in some areas, eg equine development	• Consider the need for further SPDs on sustainable development and renewable energy • There is no formal review of design quality or design award scheme • It is unclear how the risk of a high future housing allocation will be managed		

THEME 4:   PEOPLE, PERFORMANCE AND RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

ELEMENTS	STRENGTHS	AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT	KEY RECOMMENDATIONS IN PEER REVIEW REPORT	UPDATE ON KEY RECOMMENDATIONS
4.1 Capacity and use of resource	• There has been an increase in resources to meet priorities • There are good levels of PDG secured which are used exclusively for planning • There are good levels of support for professional staff, eg technical support and planning enquiries team	• Key risks (eg PDG exit) have been identified, but it is unclear how they will be managed • There is a need to make progress on Electronic Development Management System • There is a need to base future resourcing on the identified vision and aims for the service	x) Further develop the performance management of the planning service by developing local performance indicators that focus on quality and impact of developments and value for money	Performance Indicators and targets are being re-designed following the Governments recent announcement to introduce a less centrally driven and burdensome performance system, focussed on local priorities. The key question is what's important for the HBC service and how are we going to measure this?
4.2 Performance Management	• There is a performance system in place and a developing performance culture • Performance is regularly reported to and discussed by officers and members • There is a service improvement plan in place	• There is a need to focus on qualitative as well as quantitative outcomes	xi) Develop a learning strategy for the planning service, including a review of the development needs of councillors, to ensure that training is regularly refreshed and updated, and includes wider planning considerations and developments	Joint working with those responsible for Corporate member Training is required. Funding to be identified to facilitate the procurement of external trainers. Taking opportunities for free training and development opportunities eg PAS, IDeA Spatial Planning Dissemination Module. Post-entry professional and technical qualification training and NVQ's supported and funded.
			xii) Ensure that successes are celebrated, and the learning from them captured and shared (internally and externally), to inform further development and improvement	

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4.3 Learning and supportive culture	• The council asked for a peer review as an opportunity to learn • There are examples of where the council has used external challenge and review to improve, eg PAS Terraquest Report • There are some examples of learning activities, eg Wednesday learning sessions	• There is an inconsistent approach to training and development • The council needs to remember to celebrate and communicate success • There is a need to systematically seek and use best practice to continuously improve the service		Success is celebrated at all levels throughout the Division and acknowledged internally and externally through publications, ie Council Talk and media releases. Planning staff share experience and expertise at internal events eg Training Hour and Council Shared Learning Events and externally via the NYCC Training Consortium and speaking at RTPI Conference events.