

(11) REVIEW OF PLANNING ENFORCEMENT - UPDATE

1. At the Planning Enforcement workshop session with Members on 19th May, we were able to define the 'problem statement', i.e. what Members considered the main problem to be based upon their interactions with users of the service. Members considered that there was a generally-held conception that the Planning Enforcement Service does not respond quickly enough to an alleged enforcement complaint. By the end of the session it was agreed within the group that the main problem is that users of the service have expectations that don't match what the Service can deliver and that we therefore need to improve our communication with users of the service in order for them to gain a better understanding of the enforcement process in general and also of the Service provided by Cotswold District Council (CDC).

2. There are several areas identified around improving communications that require some further work:

- a) Update the Enforcement Plan;
- b) Update the Council's website and highlight the Planning Enforcement Service;
- c) Provide a clearer checklist on the website (perhaps a more interactive programme) to encourage users to learn more about how the service operates and give examples of the types of breaches that may or may not be remediated (i.e. enforcement action initiated) to try to manage users' expectations;
- d) Provide enforcement training to CDC Councillors and Town and Parish Councils to enable them to help answer enforcement queries and manage the expectations of complainants within their Wards and Parishes as many users won't necessarily use the website in the first instance; and
- e) Set up a reporting mechanism to CDC Councillors to ensure that they're aware of new cases that will require some form of remedial action and also to keep them updated with progress on existing cases.

3. I have established a team of colleagues who will help test possible solutions to the problem, and that team comprises Kevin Field (Planning and Development Manager), Andrew Moody (Senior Enforcement Planner), Bob McNally (Press & Media Liaison Officer at CDC), Sophie Brown (Front of House), Kath Hoare (Business Improvement Manager), Rob Sewell (Management Trainee) and myself.

4. The Enforcement Plan has been modified and updated and will shortly be published on the Council's website.

5. We are currently investigating the introduction of a more interactive website programme for enforcement which would enable users to follow a flow chart to learn more about enforcement and the powers we have, where we're able to assist and where we're not, and the likely timescales associated with taking different actions. We would also include a list of frequently asked questions to assist users. The deliverability of this part of the review work will be dependent upon the IT resources available to build and implement it and will inevitably be impacted by the work currently being undertaken to enable the move to Publica.

6. With regards to resourcing the Planning Enforcement Team, there has recently been a couple of changes in personnel within the existing team - Yvonne Poole left the Council on Friday 1st September and Colin Davies will take up her part-time (3 day week) post as from 2nd October. These changes have enabled us to take positive action in ensuring that the

team will have the most appropriate resources within it to deliver the service moving forward and I can advise that we have just appointed Scott Britnell as a full-time Senior Planning Enforcement Officer (he re-joins the Council on 23rd October). As of 23rd October, the team will comprise: 1x full-time Senior Planning Enforcement Officer (Scott Britnell), 1x part-time Senior Planning Enforcement Officer (Andrew Moody), 1x part-time Planning Enforcement Officer (Nikita Hooper) and 1x part-time Enforcement Officer (Colin Davies). The Planning Enforcement Officers are qualified Town Planners.

7. We had hoped to advertise a second post for a Trainee Enforcement Officer for a temporary period of one year (resourced by the additional sum of £42,000 allocated to the service by the Council); the job advert for this new post has been prepared but it is understood that we are not able to advertise the post before 1st October as the new Terms and Conditions under Publica haven't yet been finalised. We will pursue the trainee post as soon as we're able to because it is considered that this position would provide a useful support role within the enforcement team and would also provide us with the opportunity to develop staff in the role.

8. Training events for CDC Councillors and Town and Parish Councils will be organised from early November onwards.

Deborah Smith
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