

Planning Reimagined Update

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Purpose of the Report

1. The purpose of the report is to provide an update on the work that has been carried out in relation to the Planning Reimagined Action Plan (appendix A)

Forward Plan

2. This report appeared on the District Executive Forward Plan with an anticipated Committee date of June 2021, but has been set back one month later to allow a review workshop to take place before District Executive.

Public Interest

3. The report sets out the progress made on the Planning Reimagined Action Plan developed through a series of workshops with cross-party members.

Recommendations

4. District Executive recommend that the Chief Executive agrees to:-
 - a. note the contents of the report.
 - b. an update on the implementation of the action agreed by the working group to come forward to this meeting in January 2022.

Background

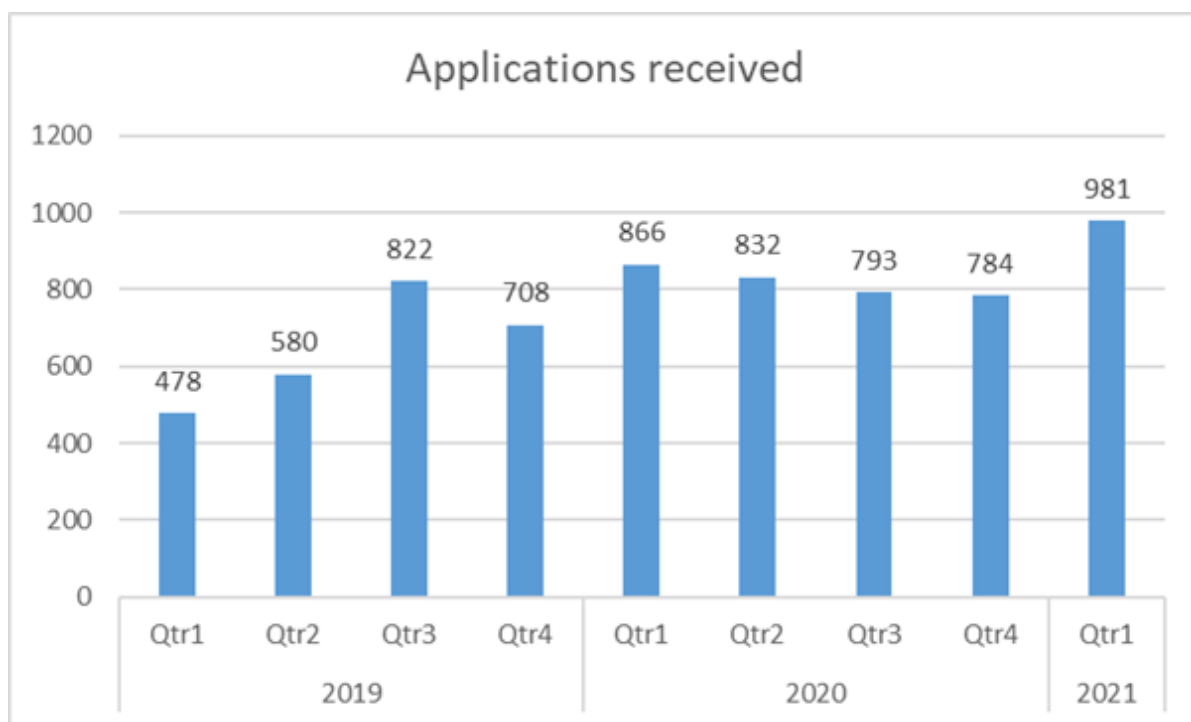
5. We are clear that the Planning Service has not been in the place we would want it to be. As part of the work to ensure we have a Planning Service that delivers and meets the requirements of the District a cross party Members working group (Planning Reimagined) was put in place.
6. The aim of the workshops was to review the entire end to end planning process, including current working practices, and to produce an action plan to achieve the following out comes:



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- Deliver the aims and objectives of the Council Plan and the Local Plan
- Deliver good outcomes for our communities
- Speed and efficiency that meets Government targets without relying on Extensions of Time
- Delivers all the above with the resources allocated to the service
- Achieve good customer service and establish a well-respected service.
- As a result of the workshops an action plan was produced and shared with the District Executive in December 2020. This report sets out the progress we have made on each action.

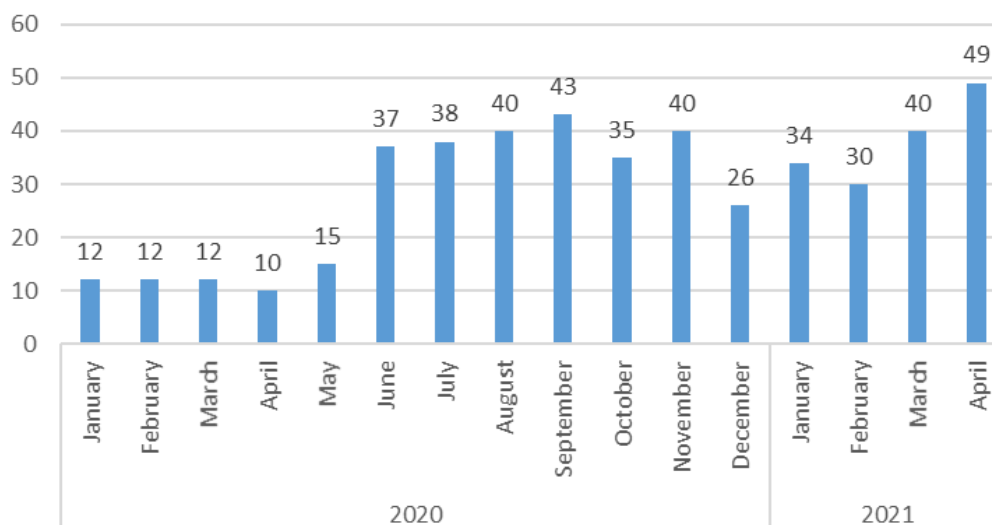
7. It has been a challenging six months for the Planning Service with the impact of Covid last longer than anyone could have anticipated requiring changes to working practices across the service. Over the last year we received an unprecedented increase in planning applications; along with the additional work bought about by the requirement to mitigate the discharge of phosphates into the water ways.
8. Table 1 below sets out the number of planning applications we have received over the last year.



9. The team has also seen a high increase in the number of enforcement cases being reported. Table 2 below sets out the increase in cases



Enforcement cases



Update on the Actions

10. Good progress has been made on many of the actions despite the setback of Covid and phosphates mitigation issues. We accept there is still work to do to improve the services but these initial steps have started to support turning the service around. There are also a number of process and services improvements that are being implemented outside of the planning reimagined action plan.
11. Appendix A sets out the actions along with an update on whether they are complete, in progress or yet to be started.
12. Whilst there is a narrative within the appendix, it is important to give a more in-depth explanation on some areas of the plan and the steps we are taking to ensure we can drive the remaining actions forward.
13. We recognised that we needed to separate out the ongoing support for the service from the service improvements work so we have now split these two areas out. The interim Lead Specialist focussing on the service improvements, liaising with Members and agents, and the interim Technical Lead to support the team determining applications and support with the major applications and key sites.
14. We also recognise the enforcement work isn't where we would like it to be but the team have been very proactive in their approach to cases. The bullet points below set out the actions that have been taken: -
 - 8 Planning Contravention Notices have been served
 - 3 active prosecutions
 - 4 Enforcement notices are currently being drafted to go to legal to serve with more to follow
 - 2 Section 215 notices currently being drafted for legal
 - 2 Section 330 notices being served



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- New templates being worked on making it easier for officers to progress matters more efficiently
 - Successfully assisted legal and Counsel on a Community Protection Order to resolve a case preventing the matter going to Court.
 - Reduction in historic cases continues with a mix of case closures and identification of ones that need to move to formal action or through the planning system.
15. Given the number of cases regarding enforcement has nearly quadrupled over the last year the team have made good progress, but to enable us to be more proactive we are adding additional resource to bolster the team over the next 6 months. With the extra resource we should see the number of open cases reduce, providing the incoming case don't increase.
16. We are now seeing an increase in decisions being made over the last 6 months despite the complications of phosphate mitigation and in April the team determined 359 cases. We believe the actions from the planning reimagined plan and the process/service improvements are making a difference.
17. We need to acknowledge it will take some time to completely turn the service around, time needs to be given to allow policies and changes to bed in. We are also experiencing a continued high number of applications, and the difficulty in recruiting planners, which is a national issue.

Financial Implications

None report is for information only.

Legal implications (if any) and details of Statutory Powers

None.

Risk Matrix

Not completed as this report is for information only

Council Plan Implications

Council Plan 2020-2024

Places where we live:-

Ensure development which is sustainable, where people want to live and communities can thrive

Enable sufficient housing in appropriate places to meet community needs

Maximised the number of affordable homes including providing more affordable homes to support rural economies and communities

Protecting Core Services



South Somerset District Council

Delivering a high quality, effective and timely service to our customers and communities

Carbon Emissions and Climate Change Implications

Not applicable this report is for information only.

Equality and Diversity Implications

Not applicable this report is for information only.

Privacy Impact Assessment

Not applicable this report is for information only.

Background Papers

- Planning Reimagined Dec 2020 District Executive