

Economy and Growth Select Committee

16 June 2022

Questions referred to the Executive Member

The following questions have been received from Cllr. T Ashton

Question 1

Over 6 weeks ago I submitted a question for the Council meeting of May 5th.
Will the Leader please supply members with a spreadsheet of all minor planning applications that were RECEIVED over 8 weeks ago and not yet determined, including when each application was received.

At the meeting the leader responded that I would have an answer “shortly”.
The convention has always been that Councillors will receive an answer within 5 working days, when will the Leader answer?

Answer

My apologies for the delay in responding to Cllr Ashton. Our Development Services have prepared a list as requested. Unfortunately, our systems only allow this to be produced in PDF format and unfortunately it does not include the precise submission date, although applications are listed by year. I am able to share this with you and officers in the service can advise any additional information required.

However, if it is essential that it is provided in spreadsheet (Excel) format, this will require a significant amount of officer time to manually type the information into a spreadsheet.

Question 2

At that same Council meeting I also asked what support our excellent Head of Planning Service was receiving in terms of both Senior Management and financial support.

The Leader’s response was very lengthy but did not address the question, please advise the Senior Management and financial support being provided to our valued Service Head.

Answer

In terms of financial support, we have made the budget available to use external private consultancy to provide additional capacity to cover vacant posts and also to try to reduce the backlog of planning applications in the system. This equates to around £80k of spending. In addition, we have agreed to fund the upgrading of one of the vacant planning officer posts from part time to full time to increase capacity in the team.

Support is also being provided to the Head of Service, via the Executive Director (Place) and the Chief Executive.

Question 3

At the 5th May meeting the Leader stated that a recovery plan was being drawn up for the Service. In November I was advised that a recovery plan was being drawn up.

Are there two recovery plans or has it taken six months to draw up a recovery plan?

Answer

There is a single service improvement plan which involves a number of measures including a communications protocol to improve customer service and responsiveness. The use of consultancy to tackle the backlog is another measure.

In addition I have asked for additional elements to be included including reviewing the tree service and considering options on separate out some elements of the current service to allow greater focus on the requirements within the development service, looking at our enforcement capacity and considering options within the Organisational Development Strategy to focus improvements in our recruitment processes.