

Regulatory Services

Compliance

The major success of Q4 was the entering of a guilty plea by a local food business operator to charges of failing to keep the dairy clean and in good repair and condition and her cheese consistently showing the presence of harmful bacteria. This was the culmination of a lot of work by the food officers with support from colleagues across the Regulatory Services and the legal team. The knock on consequence was that there was pressure to complete all the required food inspections in the year, however with concerted effort, careful targeting and using alternative strategies all but the low risk premises were completed.

Enforcement

The presence of the two additional planning enforcement officers has continued to have a significant impact. The team has been continuing to address the backlog of cases together with providing a more efficient response to new cases being reported. Of the 102 new cases this quarter, 38 have either been closed or progressed to formal enforcement. The majority of the remainder will be resolved through voluntary compliance or regularisation through the planning system. Decisions in respect of most cases, unless requiring complex investigation, are now reached within 4 weeks of the date of receipt. 88 of the new cases were allocated to the new officers. These officers are also making significant inroads into the backlog of the more straightforward cases currently outstanding.

The more complex and longstanding cases remain in the hands of the 'original' team members who are now able to devote more time to that work. There have been some significant breaches of planning control brought to our attention leading to enforcement notices being issued requiring the partial or total demolition of private dwellings

We continue to investigate all reported instances of fly-tipping and have played a lead role in a multi-agency project to address a major 'fly-tipping' problem in the eastern area of the District. The project goes 'live' for an eighteen months period commencing in early April 2016.

The remediation statements for the contaminated land at Priddy have not been received back in the offices – staff resource constraints due sickness and maternity leave have resulted in additional pressure within the team with officers covering this role. We have successfully provided Environmental Protection related training for a Student EHO who has in turn provided support and cover for the department

Access to Services

Customer services, Revenues, Benefits and Fraud (CSRBF)

It has been critical within this quarter for the CSRBF team to support the progression of the Corporate Services Project (CSP) including staff engagement in dialogue with bidders, responding to information requests and building relationships with the 5 council partners as we move into the transitional phase of the project. This has required a whole team approach by staff, who have undertaken additional duties and responsibilities in order to maintain the high standards of service delivery to our customers. The team have continued to develop other key areas of work such as the implementation of Universal Credit preparation and One Mail within the Revenues and Benefits service to secure budget savings and the re-negotiation of contractual targets within the service.

The team have also provided technical expertise to support Corporate Finance with the modelling of NNDR (Non-Domestic Rates) national changes and impact and proposals to implement a County wide Council Tax Support additional funding Scheme. In addition, negotiations have continued with Somerset County Council to develop a Hub environment at the Glastonbury Council Access Point. The team have worked exceptionally hard during this quarter to maintain service delivery and to meet the demands of a major procurement project with a high level national profile; this level of commitment is set to continue through the next quarter and beyond.

Business Information Systems (BIS)

This quarter has remained very busy both for BIS and our associated Capita teams with ongoing vacancies, recruitment, major projects work and an additional external audit of IT general controls. The level of requests for support dropped slightly from the previous quarter to 325, 40% of which were website-related. Street Naming and Numbering applications remained steady, with 28 new applications and 22 completed. The team have maintained the national GOLD standard for its Local Land and Property Gazetteer throughout the quarter.

Significant achievements and projects work have included: achieving the reaccreditation of the PSN Code of Connection; input to the Corporate Services Procurement process across both Lots; external malware and IT general controls audits; change of contracted stationery supplier; installation and user training for the Legal Case Management System; successful completion of the iDox upgrades and implementation of MapLoader; set-up and user testing of online payments for Temporary Events Notices; development of Data sharing agreements for the Building Control partnership; recruitment to the vacant posts.

There have remained vacant posts within the team, which, along with the heavy commitment of staff resource to the Corporate Services Procurement project, has continued to impact on the delivery of some planned actions for the year. The impact of the additional priority workload for Corporate Services Procurement, shared services projects and the vacant posts is continuing into 16-17 and will impact our capacity to undertake new projects.

Economic Development

Q4 was dominated by redundancy announcements by Shepton Cider Mill, BSKyB, Clarks and Easynet. A programme of support is being led by the DWP/Jobcentre Plus, with support from MDC on housing and benefits advice for affected employees. Investment news in Q4 included the purchase of Dulcote Quarry for the redevelopment of the site with a planning application anticipated next quarter. 14 commercial land and property enquiries were received this quarter including 3 overseas enquiries, and a new gaming software company has successfully relocated to Frome with plans to create 5-10 new jobs.

Entries opened this quarter for the Mendip Business Awards, and a marketing campaign was run in association with the Mid Somerset Series, the Frome Standard, the local Chambers of Commerce and the Federation of Small Businesses.

www.mendipbusinessawards.co.uk

Enterprise Mendip, supported by Street Chamber, hosted their second significant B2B event for small and start-up businesses at the Redbrick Building in Glastonbury this quarter, with over 40 businesses attending both the B2B drop in sessions and three seminars held on digital marketing, business growth and maximising business performance. Further events in Frome and Wells (Mendip Business Exchange) with Strode College were also held. A short business survey has also been developed in partnership with the Chambers to assess demand for further business training sessions.

Built Environment

Housing Options

Housing Options have many detailed KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) 41 in total.

66% are on target and 30% of these have exceeded targets.

Housing options continues to make good progress. The HOT (Housing Options Team) were awarded the bronze standard by the National Practitioner Support Service in Q3 and are now working towards the Silver Award. Funding has been secured to extend the Outreach Service for Rough Sleepers.

34% of the KPIs are working towards the target :-

10% are close to the target, almost achieved;

10% delayed due to operational priorities or waiting for external actions;

7% are areas where support will be provided to encourage staff improvements;

5% are due to lack of available staff/resources.

This quarter there was a spike in the number of single vulnerable clients presenting as homeless, as a result the percentage of households in temporary accommodation spending time in B&B was 36% and above the 20% target, however none of these were families or 16/17 year olds.

Health and Wellbeing & Strategic Housing:

A draft older persons strategy has been written for management to consider next steps; this will be presented scrutiny and cabinet in due course. Delivery of healthy living events to older people across the district has been delayed due to issues recruiting. Provision of an update for members regarding the key housing needs of vulnerable people in the district via provision of a factsheet for members is also delayed.

Private Sector Housing:

100% of Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) have been processed in a timely manner and the MDC team remain actively involved in the strategic direction of DFG funding. Also on target is the development of a suite of monitoring information to report performance and track benefits of improving standards in client's homes and monitor impact of raising standards in the home.

Proactive engagement with owners continues to encourage home owners to bring empty homes back into use. Design and launch of a customer survey to inform future council policy and deliver empty homes back to market is work in progress for delivery in 2016/2017.

Planning

The team has continued to consolidate improved the speed and quality of planning decisions over the quarter. In particular, performance on 'minor' and 'other' category applications has improved significantly. For the year ending Q4 2015/16, 83% of 'Minors' were decided with 8 weeks (or agreed extension) compared to 45% in 2014/15. This exceeds our own target for the year (of 70%) by some margin. Similarly, for 'Others', 83% were determined in time compared to 54% in the previous year and exceeding an internal target of 80%. At the same time performance on informal pre-application enquiries has remained high at a 79% success rate for the year 2015/16.

The Council's success rate at appeal has remained comparable to the previous year at 78% compared with the internal target of 66%. Over the quarter, some partial costs were awarded against the Council at appeal. Whilst these are small in number, careful monitoring and review is being undertaken to ensure these are reduced or eliminated in future quarters.

The uncertainty around national policies on affordable housing previously noted continued throughout Quarter 4 and a Court of Appeal decision is expected in May 2016. Speculation also continued on the likely content of the emerging Housing and Planning Bill. This will impact on the team's work through the introduction of fundamental new national policies on affordable housing, starter and self build homes. As regards the latter, the Planning Team launched the Council's first Self/Custom-build register, inviting expressions of interest from those wishing to express an interest in building their own home.

Preparatory work has been undertaken on the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) although a report from a national expert panel on the future of CIL is also awaited and expected imminently. The Planning Policy section also jointly commissioned a Strategic Housing Market Assessment Review alongside other Somerset authorities under the 'Duty to Co-operate'. The Team also fed into the emerging sub-regional planning arrangements in the West of England (Bristol, B&NES, South Glos and North Somerset) area.

Significant progress was made on neighbourhood planning over the quarter with the successful independent examination of the Frome Neighbourhood Plan – the first in Mendip to have reached this milestone stage. This means the Plan, which has been closely supported by MDC Planning Policy officers, may now proceed to a public referendum. Consultation responses were also submitted on behalf of the Council to the Rode Neighbourhood Plan which reached its initial 'draft Plan' consultation stage in the quarter.

Built Environment Technical

The commencement of the new temporary Assistant Conservation Officer has brought much needed extra resource into the team and ensured that they have met their operation plan targets for the year as well as provided a timely service for our customers.

The planned works to the Consultee Access system was postponed in order to redeploy staff to support of the processing of applications as a priority. This has contributed significantly to the high performance figures identified in the Planning Team update.

The Planning portal announced a new version to be rolled out during Q4, but unfortunately a corresponding test system was not created as part of this roll out. To ensure the payment connection worked correctly the decision has been made to postpone go live until the payment system could be tested on this new version and we can be confident that our customers submissions will properly processed.

Governance, Assets and Public Spaces

Operational Assets

Core Services Contract Performance Monitoring: The Supplier Review Document has been completed and endorsed by both the Audit Committee and Scrutiny. This is a culmination of a huge amount of work but it does not mean that we can move forward in the knowledge that the Core Services Contract has effective monitoring in place. There has been a proactive approach to sharing the information with parish and town councils and joint monitoring site visits were arranged.

Support was given by the team and Core Services Contractor for the Clean for the Queen initiative across the district in March and this work is continuing. Clean for the Queen is a national campaign which aims to tackle the blight of litter by encouraging community clean-ups and litter picking across the country.

Planning permission was granted for the Shepton Mallet Cemetery project in March 2016 and works can now commence in quarters 2 and 3 of 2016/17 to provide further burial space.

A new bereavement management software called Plotbox has been procured and went live 22nd February 2016. Plotbox replaces an outdated database and records more detail (eg grave depth) which will improve the efficiency of the operation. This was the culmination of two and a half years work on the procurement project working alongside the BIS team.

The resurfacing works carried out at Southside Car Park in Street was done to a high standard with the minimum of disruption to users of this popular and busy car park.

The issues facing the team include a delay in the play refurbishment at Cinnamon Lane, Glastonbury due to exceptionally wet weather conditions. This work will be completed in quarter 1 of 2016/17. Objections were received in respect of the planning application to fell a number of trees at Shepton Mallet Cemetery to accommodate a number of graves that were reserved in the 1970s. The planning application will be determined in 2016/17.

The Operational Assets and Contracts Team has been subject to a comprehensive review which comes into effect on 1st April 2016. Two senior members of the team have now left, other team members have been re-deployed, a new officer is now leading bereavement services and an officer has been promoted to Contracts Manager. Additional resource to work in the Shape Mendip Neighbourhoods project is yet to be recruited and a modern apprentice will join the team to give admin support.

Strategic Assets

The team continues to strategically manage the whole of the council's landholding, including to ensure that long term regeneration opportunities are adequately protected. We continue to advise councillors, communities, and individuals on matters relating to

assets of Community Value; and are advising the Wells Recreation Ground Trust in matters relating to boundaries and landlord's consent.

The team deals with a raft of applications for new leases, licences, and landlord's consents - including legal arrangements relating to community sports facilities in Wells and Shepton Mallet, and Fusion's investment work under its leases of the leisure facilities.

30 property enquiries were received in the quarter, including 2 requests for potential acquisitions of parcels of the Council's land, and disposals with a value of £58,500 are now in solicitors' hands. Also there is potentially up to £20,000 available for a deed of grant of additional rights of way over MDC land, to service a new housing development which has recently been granted planning consent.

The Mendip CCTV service noted similar activity to that of the same period in 2015. 87 incidents were raised, which covers both Incident Requests received from the Police; and CCTV Instigated Arrests, where the CCTV team requested the police to immediately react to, and deal with, potentially criminal activity or disorder. The level of camera and other equipment maintenance continues to run at the expected level for an ageing system, and the faults arising remain economic to repair.

A significant amount of resource has been dedicated to developing the Strategic Asset Management Plan and a draft forward plan of projects.

Corporate Support

Another busy quarter for the team where much has been achieved despite a variety of challenges. An action plan that outlines the Council's approach to the threats of bribery and corruption in response to a joint amber alert issued by the National Crime Agency (NCA) and the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) has been largely implemented. Policy and associated constitutional amendments to be finalised at Full Council next quarter.

A report on the implications the National Living Wage was prepared for CMT, the 2016/17 Pay Policy was produced and endorsed, the Corporate Service Project bids for HR, Local Land Charges (LLC) and Procurement were subject to an internal review and work has continued to support the emerging transformation agenda and strategy.

Preparations are well underway for the Police and Crime Commissioner elections and date of EU referendum has been confirmed. The date of the 23rd June coincides with Glastonbury Festival so work is underway to manage the impact upon capacities and the availability of MDC and external staff to assist with the elections process. Polling stations will actually be inside the festival traffic control cordon, which will introduce its own logistical challenges.

The LLC team has benefitted from 2 weeks worth of external support from the London Borough of Barnet who have provided 2 experienced officers for this period. This assistance has helped to reduce the overall backlog by approximately 50 searches and arrangements are in place for this support to continue. New administrative support has also been appointed for the service.

The HR service has continued to be heavily involved in the Corporate Services Project providing support to the process and also to the staff affected. The team have also been supporting the emerging Management Restructure. The second Mendip Health & Wellbeing week was successfully delivered in January.

Within Democratic Services four elected member training sessions have been held on: Warmer Improved Somerset Homes (WISH); sessions 3 and 4 of mandatory planning training; IT session to resolve outstanding issues; and safeguarding children and sexual exploitation. The Mendip Elected Members' Allowances Scheme was also updated and will start from 1st April 2016 and a Members visit to Wyke Farm was arranged and hosted on behalf of the Chairman.

In the final quarter of the year democratic Services administered 17 requests for information under the Data Protection Act and 174 Freedom of Information Requests, which represents our busiest quarter of the year.

In preparation for the first year of operation a fundamental review of the Legal service has been completed, including a restructure, resulting in more efficient and effective services. In this period the service has completed 13 Section 106 agreements, 6 enforcement notices, 1 section 215 notice, 3 lawful development certificates, 8 executed contracts, 5 notices seeking possession as well as attending 22 committee meetings and a planning inquiry.

Completed project work includes the Transfer of Flatner Museum Watchet, the Transfer of Taunton Deane Borough Council DLO facility and development agreement, the agreement for Lease with Tone Leisure for a new pool at Blackbrook, Taunton, the transfer of a large scale public open space at Wellington, netting £117k in commuted sums and the completion of the 4-authority Building Control Partnership Agreement.

Exploratory discussions have continued with neighbouring authorities to establish the opportunities to expand upon the current Legal Shared Service to introduce further resilience, savings, efficiencies and improved customer service.

Discussions have also been taking place for additional services to be delivered from the Shape Mendip Hub.

Policy and Performance

During the quarter the team has been contributing to a wide range of projects and initiatives. This includes providing support to the Wells Recreation Ground Trust project and the Law and Governance Shared Service project. Work is also underway to progress the Shape Mendip Neighbourhoods project to the next phase, including working with the Operational Assets and Contracts Team to explore links with the Core Services contract, and working with the Police to develop a Virtual One Team for Mendip. Members of the team have been supporting the Corporate Manager in drafting themed strategies and approaches to underpin the council's emerging transformation programme.

In January, dialogue was reopened with Somerset County Council (SCC) regarding opportunities to bring additional services to the Shape Mendip Hub in Shepton Mallet, and it was agreed that the Shape Mendip brand will be reflected in the SCC's Library Hub in Glastonbury.

The performance team are working with Corporate Management team to close out the previous Corporate Plan actions. The team is also researching ways for the council to increase its performance reporting in relation to key front line services and partnership initiatives.

Two Parish Information surgeries were piloted; one in Draycott and the other in Wanstrow. These were delivered in collaboration with Somerset Association of Local Councils (SALC) and a number of other partners including SCC, Somerset Waste Partnership, and SASP. The objective was to see if drop in surgeries across the district would increase engagement with parish councils. Whilst feedback from those who attended was positive, the actual numbers of attendees was low. The team are now exploring other approaches, including linking with the Police's PACT forums and changing the format of the Rural Forum to make it more participative.

The newly appointed Local Legacy Development Officer joined the team in January and has been working with community groups who were awarded Local Legacy Funding in 2015/16 to support the delivery of their projects. The team continues to support the Health and Wellbeing agenda through leading the Employment and Skills subgroup and planning events such as the End Loneliness event to be held in early 2016/17.