TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

PLANNING and TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY BOARD

24 October 2005

Report of the Director of Planning & Transportation

Part 1- Public

Matters for Recommendation to Cabinet - Non-Key Decision (Decision may be taken by the Cabinet Member)

1   <u>DEVELOPMENT CONTROL</u>

Summary
To update members on applications decision performance, User Satisfaction Survey, Planning Delivery Grant (PDG), the End- to-End Uniform e-planning system, staffing matters funded by PDG and future data scanning work.

1.1   Planning applications performance

1.1.1   The performance of the Section has a direct effect on the level of PDG achieved. It is crucial that we maintain, and where possible, enhance our performance as 2006/7 may be the last year of PDG (and thus the ability to invest in enhanced systems and structures to maintain performance in the longer term).

1.1.2   Our most recent performance, for the calculation of PDG, is set out in the table below. The overall result is pleasing in that all targets were met and performance improved in key performance areas.

ODPM target	DC Performance Plan target	Oct 03-Sep 04	Oct 04-June 05
60% **(Major applications)**	**55%**	**66.04%**	**63.83%**
65% **(Minor applications)**	**55%**	**65.19%**	**65.86%**
80% **(Other applications)**	**70%**	**82.01%**	**85.88%**

1.1.3   It is far from simple to maintain this speed of determination while also maintaining and improving our interventions to improve schemes and test them more

thoroughly. As part of our approach to try and balance these issues we have for some years employed temporary planners in support of the core staff. Members may recall that I previously reported the intention to appoint a new permanent Senior Planning Officer. This approach was approved by General Purposes Committee and I am pleased to be able to say that we have been able to find a suitable candidate and all being well she will join us in about two months time. We have also just extended the contract of a part time temporary planner by 12 more months.

1.2   User Satisfaction Survey

1.2.1   The BVPI satisfaction surveys are currently carried-out every three years. The latest survey is for 2003/4 and revealed the following headlines:

- 84% of applicants or their agents were very satisfied or fairly satisfied with the service in processing their application - BVPI 111.

- The main drivers of applicants/agents' satisfaction with the application processing service (BVPI 111) were:

    - Prompt responses to their queries
    - A sense that they were being treated fairly and their viewpoint listened to
    - Being kept informed about the progress of their application
    - Being given the advice and help they needed to submit their application correctly
    - Understanding the reasons for the decision made on their application(s)

These outweighed all other influences, including the Council's determination of the application(s).

For BVPI 111 (2003/04), the service achieved the following placings:

- top quartile performance position nationally

- top quartile performance compared with our CIPFA group.

- inter-quartile range position compared with district councils in Kent.

Most importantly the Council's development control satisfaction performance improved by 8 percentage points between 2000/01 and 2003/04 showing a generally more favourable direction of travel than most other authorities in Kent.

BVPI 111 RESULTS - COMPARISON WITH OTHER COUNCILS		
National (All England)	CIPFA Family Group	Kent Districts
2000/01 🟨	🟨	🟨
2003/04 🟩	🟩	🟨
Key: Top Quartile 🟩	Inter-quartile Range 🟨	Bottom Quartile 🟥

1.3   End-to-End Planning and the website

1.3.1   These related projects have been wholly funded by PDG from this year and last year. It is major spend of some £100,000 and is now implemented. There are still parts of the system to finalise but it is now possible to:

- Submit planning applications via the Internet and the National Planning Portal

- View new applications (including plans and documents)

- Begin to view planning site histories as they are loaded

- Access planning policy documents (both TMBC and Government) via both Council Website and the Planning Portal.

In the near future, and as soon as practical, it will be possible to follow the progress of an application and submit comments online.

1.3.2   This is a very significant step forward for both the e-planning and e-government credentials of the Council. It essential to commit more of our historic records to electronic form. The only practical way to do this is let a major contract for the work.

1.4   Application back-scanning

1.4.1   At the meeting of the Board on 23 May 2005 I reported the intention to spend part of the Planning Delivery Grant for 2005/6 on the back scanning of planning application history files for electronic indexing to the Uniform system so as to allow them to be displayed via the Council's website. This is a key factor in meeting the Council's IEG obligations and also ensures that there is no impediment to obtaining PDG for 2006/7 in respect of this aspect of e-planning. In addition I am intending that such a scanning exercise will create some floorspace to ease the accommodation pressure in the department.

1.4.2   In addition to this work it would be my normal practice to "microfilm" a proportion of historic files in both the Development Control and Building Control Services to

ensure that there is always sufficient shelf space to receive at least one year's new case files. This is enshrined in the base budget for the two sections.

1.4.3   The budgetary position is therefore as follows:

- Planning Delivery Grant   £100,000

- Development Control Base Budget   £ 10,000

- Building Control Base Budget   £ 5,000

                    Total   **£115,000**

1.4.4   Such a substantial contract needs to be procured by a tendering process. Bearing in mind the large number of potential able suppliers of this service and also the very specific nature of the work to ensure indexing compatibly with Uniform and the website, I intend to advertise the work with the aim of creating an *Ad Hoc* list. In accordance with my delegated powers I will select suppliers to tender.

1.4.5   The decision as to the supplier who is successful will turn on matters such as technical capability, speed of turn round and quality assurance as well as just price. I therefore intend to establish a tender selection group. As the matters involved in the selection decision are technical in nature I propose that the selection group is an officer group comprising representatives from Planning (both DC and BC), Health and Housing (who are the Uniform main system co-ordinators) and IT.

1.4.6   Once the process is complete I shall report the name of the appointed supplier to the first available meeting of this Board.

1.5   Staffing

1.5.1   Other than the Senior Planning Officer mentioned above we are also seeking to appoint an Enforcement Team Leader. Unfortunately the first set of interviews did not produce a suitable candidate and a further advertisement is in hand. We are also about to advertise for a permanent scanning clerk – a new post funded out of base budget to deal with the new world of displaying applications on the website. We have also recently extended by a further 12 months the post of temporary part time Senior Planner in Development Control.

1.6   The Future

1.6.1   It appears that PDG may continue into 2007/8 and on the basis of early information it appears that settlements will refocus back towards Development Control performance (the 2006/7 award formula has been focussed slightly, and only slightly, towards LDF preparation– the actual settlement will not be know until early 2006). It is therefore imperative that we aim to keep our establishment in Development Control at the best level that we can achieve so as to maintain and enhance our performance during the forthcoming years.

1.7   Recommendation

1.7.1   The report **BE NOTED** and the arrangements for procurement of a scanning
contract **BE ENDORSED.**

Background papers: contact: Lindsay Pearson
                                                                              ref: B11 & B18
Nil

Steve Humphrey
Director of Planning & Transportation