

Appendix B

Internal Audit Report 2426 – Planning Enforcement

Overall opinion

| Net Risk Rating | Description | Assurance Assessment |
|-----------------|---|----------------------|
| Minor | A sound system of governance, risk management and control exists, with internal controls operating effectively and being consistently applied to support the achievement of objectives in the area audited. | Substantial |

The organisational risk level at which this risk assessment applies is:

| Risk Level | Definition |
|----------------|---|
| Service | This issue / risk level impacts at the Business Plan level (i.e. individual services or departments as a whole). Mitigating actions should be implemented by the responsible Head of Service. |

Assurance assessment

The level of net risk is assessed as **MINOR**, with the control framework deemed to provide **SUBSTANTIAL** assurance over the effectiveness of processes in place in respect of planning enforcement. Substantial assurance has been taken over the following aspects:

- **Written Procedures** – These are generally comprehensive and up to date. For customers, clear information is set out online and in the Council’s Planning Enforcement Charter.
- **Documentation** – Enforcement practice, including the steps taken, and the reasons for action, or not to act, is generally well documented, with detailed records held on the planning enforcement system.

However, the review identified some areas of weakness where enhancements could be made to strengthen the framework of control, specifically:

- **Consistent Processing** – Variations from standard practice are not always clearly documented. These should be confirmed by management either on a case by case basis, or documented in written procedures.
- **Scope for Automation** – Although comprehensive records are maintained on the planning enforcement system, much of the data is being processed offline using alternative means. There may be scope for greater use of the system and process automation to enhance efficiency, and to provide assurance that all cases are being progressed to a satisfactory conclusion.
- **Review and Approval** – Cases can be closed on the instruction of a Senior Planner with no review by another Officer. Whilst no issues were identified during audit review of a sample of cases, there is a risk of cases being closed inappropriately, which could be mitigated through secondary review.

- **Performance Data** –The Service is not monitoring and reporting on delivery against all of the performance standards set out in the Planning Enforcement Charter. Improved data and monitoring, and system / process improvements, would provide more assurance that standards are being met.

Recommendations have been made to address the noted points and support Management to strengthen the framework of control.

Severe or major issues / risks

No severe or major issues/risk were identified as part of this review.

Management response

The Planning Service acknowledges and welcomes the findings of the internal audit which demonstrate a sound system of governance within planning enforcement. A well-developed series of written procedures and processes for staff is recognised alongside clear and well understood information for customers on the Council's website and in the Planning Enforcement Charter. The findings reflect the significant work undertaken by the team since the previous internal audit in 2016/17 to put a sound framework in place for planning enforcement.

However, it is acknowledged there is further work to do. As part of continuous improvement, the Service accepts the recommendations for improvement. Process guidance will be reviewed and updated, alongside a review of the opportunities for a more automated 'end to end' data management process, and a review of performance standards.