

PLANNING TURNAROUND DISTRICT ANALYSIS March 2014

The attached spreadsheets, 'RSN Development Control Analysis' set out our latest analysis of Planning Turnaround statistics for local district authorities across England. This analysis compares your authority to other rural authorities and family authorities. All information is taken from the Department for Communities and Local Government at www.gov.uk.

There are two analyses attached:

1. RSN Development Control Analysis QE March 2014 – showing performance for the quarter January to March 2014.
2. RSN Development Control Analysis YE March 2014 – showing performance for the year ending March 2014.

What does it show?

By selecting your authority in the top left yellow box, you can see your performance in relation to three indicators, Turnaround time for Major, Minor and Other Applications.

Why these measures?

These traditional performance measures, long collected by the Government to measure success in the planning system, are lagging indicators; they measure what has already happened in the system and are not necessarily an indicator of a good experience for the customer.

Turnaround time from the date of a valid application being received to a decision may only be 5 or 6 weeks, but from the customers perspective the clock starts when they hand in their application to the council, or their agent whether it is a valid application or not.

Planning will always be a contentious subject as the outcomes can affect so many individuals and organisations, a 'good' decision could differ for the applicant, neighbour, parish council or community as a whole and a range of factors should be considered by an authority to determine the successful performance of their planning department.

This analysis however focuses on the turnaround time indicators as these are readily available for every authority. We would be interested to hear from authorities that are using alternative indicators to manage their performance or who would like to share their improvement stories with the rural planning community.

The top performing district authorities are continuing to perform well, for the year ending March 2014, top quartile performance for Minor Applications was 78% and for Other applications, this was 90%.

Who is doing well?
Focus on West Somerset

For the yearly performance up to March 2014 when considering Minor and Other Developments, West Somerset, a Predominantly Rural Council is performing excellently. It is third behind Warwick and Watford on Minor applications with 95% determined within time limits and joint third with 98% turnaround times for Other applications.

Andrew Goodchild, the Planning Manager cites a range of reasons for this performance. These factors focus not on determining applications in 8 weeks, but on providing an excellent service for the customer throughout the processing of the application.

- A strong emphasis on pre-application discussion.
- A very good working relationship with local agents, their most regular customers. This includes an agents panel which has been running for a number of years, and involves the planning department updating them on not only the service, but also legislation and guidance. There is also an Accredited Agents Scheme where valid applications are registered on the same day they are submitted and they aim to deal with them within 6 rather than the normal 8 weeks. *“This has built trust and confidence between us on the quality of applications and is based on a culture of good communication and no surprises”*
- Good and timely communication between the LPA and applicants, agents, Town and Parish Councils, neighbours and Ward Members. This means that they can focus on progressing applications rather than dealing with chasing emails / calls and complaints.
- The Planning Committee is well run and Site Visits are arranged in advance for those applications which are either complex or would benefit from Members understanding the context of a site. These are held in advance of Planning Committee and they have not deferred an application for a Site Visit for over 4 years
- They have utilised Planning Performance Agreements for their most complex applications including both agreeing to a target determination date but also involving resources being secured for us to fast track consideration without detracting from our day to day work on other applications
- West Somerset has a small but very dedicated team and the Manager aims to discuss and agree an approach to an application very early on in the process to enable officers to prioritise their workload. *“In effect we make sure that we don't let difficult applications ‘fester’ because an officer is unsure of which approach to take.*

Top 10 performing District Councils Year ending March 2014		Top 10 performing District Councils Year ending March 2014	
MINOR APPS	% within 8 weeks	OTHER APPS	% within 8 weeks
Warwick	97	Watford	100
Watford	96	East Staffordshire	99
West Somerset	95	Corby	98
East Staffordshire	94	Rushmoor	98
Mansfield	93	West Somerset	98
Three Rivers	91	Ashfield	97
Harlow	90	South Bucks	97
South Bucks	90	Three Rivers	97
Corby	88	Warwick	97
Rossendale	88	Waverley	97
Rushmoor	88		