

Report to **Policy & Resources Committee**
Date **27 June 2024**
By **Director of Planning (Interim)**
Title of Report **Annual Review of Planning Performance: Financial Year 2023/24**
Note

Recommendation: The Committee is recommended to receive and consider the Annual Review of Planning Performance.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Planning is one of the strongest tools the Authority has for furthering the National Park's statutory purposes and duty as well as being an important statutory function of the Authority. Planning also plays an important part in helping deliver the vision, objectives and outcomes of the National Park's Partnership Management Plan (PMP).
- 1.2 The SDNPA is one of the largest planning authorities in the country, both geographically and in terms of the number of applications and other related matters dealt with. Consequently the Authority's Planning Directorate, together with our five host authorities, interacts with many thousands of people a year and this contact may be an individual's only contact with the Authority.
- 1.3 Whilst a summary of all appeal decisions is reported to Planning Committee on a quarterly basis it is Policy and Resources Committee that has wider oversight of the Authority's planning performance. This report sets out, in a presentation at Appendix I, an overview of planning performance in the financial year 2023/24.
- 1.4 The Policy and Resources Committee has terms of reference which include "To monitor and review the performance, including financial performance, of the Authority in the context of its business delivery ... and make recommendations for changes as appropriate". Whilst the report calls on the committee to receive and consider the annual review of planning performance, the terms of reference for the committee include considering if the committee wishes to make any recommendations arising from its consideration of the report. Any such recommendations would be subject to a vote at the committee meeting.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 Planning performance, as an Authority and within that of the five host authorities, is subject to regular performance management with performance being consistently monitored, evaluated and reported on a wide variety of metrics. Planning performance is also discussed with the host authorities at a senior officer level. It is also rigorously monitored by central Government through quarterly 'statistical returns'.
- 2.2 Overall planning performance continues to be good and all government targets have been met. Appeal performance was good (albeit lower than in previous years) whilst our Enforcement teams have continued to deal with a high number of complaints and correspondence about alleged breaches across the Park. A high profile enforcement example

includes the direct action that SDNPA took in May and June 2023 to shore up two listed buildings (and demolish three unsafe chimneys) following a fire in Midhurst.

- 2.3 As always - and as the attached presentation illustrates - there is always room for improvement including addressing variations in host authority performance. The value of these arrangements should not however be underestimated.
- 2.4 Members may be aware that Lewes District Council has been designated (similar to ‘special measures’) by the Government for the quality of its decision making in respect of major development. This relates to Lewes District Council as a Local Planning Authority and does not directly affect Lewes District Council’s work on behalf of SNDPA as we are a separate Local Planning Authority.
- 2.5 In last year’s report to Policy and Resources Committee reference was made to the high number of vacancies in SDNPA’s planning team. At the time of writing the SDNPA has been successful in recruiting to posts but most of our host authorities have had problems with recruitment in the year and this has affected performance at points (albeit overall performance remains very good). Recruiting experienced planners remains difficult, not only locally but nationally and also in the private as well as the public sector.
- 2.6 The year has seen a number of changes made to the English planning system by the Government. Two major changes are:
 - i) The introduction of mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG). BNG has been part of our award winning Local Plan since 2019 however it is now legally mandated and England is the first country in the world to legally mandate BNG through development.
 - ii) For the first time in many years planning application fees were increased in December (by between 25-35%). Moving forward the Government has said that planning application fees will be uprated each year in line with inflation.
- 2.7 Finally, the summary at Appendix I provides an overview of planning performance but it is important to note that each year the Authority also produces an Authority Monitoring Report (AMR) in December. The AMR reports on a number of planning documents such as the South Downs Local Plan, neighbourhood development plans and waste and minerals plans. It considers the performance of policies across the National Park, and trends against various indicators including those directly affected by the planning process as well as those more indirectly affected.
- 2.8 The AMR includes all indicators which are monitored along with any relevant targets, and which Local Plan policy each indicator relates to. An output is set out for each indicator followed by a brief commentary highlighting the key findings of the output and relating these back to local and Government policies.

3. Planning Newsletter

- 3.1 Since Autumn 2017 the Authority has produced a newsletter three times a year covering key planning news. The newsletter also showcases some of the Authority’s key achievements in planning and the distribution list has grown to over 1,400 people. The last newsletter, from Spring 2024, is included for reference at Appendix 2.

4. Other Implications

Implication	Yes*/No
Will further decisions be required by another committee/full authority?	No further decisions required. Another update on planning performance will be presented to Policy and Resources Committee in 2025.
Does the proposal raise any Resource implications?	Not directly – the delivery of planning services are resourced from the Authority’s core budget and income brought in from Planning.

How does the proposal represent Value for Money?	Performance management is established practice for ensuring value for money.
Are there any Social Value implications arising from the proposal?	None, but note there is social value to the partnership arrangements.
Have you taken regard of the South Downs National Park Authority's equality duty as contained within the Equality Act 2010?	As this is a monitoring report there are no direct equality considerations arising out of this report. The Planning system is delivered in accordance with the Equality Act 2010. Any individual projects such as the Local Plan also go through the Authority's internal Equality Diversity and Inclusion assessment.
Are there any Human Rights implications arising from the proposal?	None
Are there any Crime & Disorder implications arising from the proposal?	None
Are there any Health & Safety implications arising from the proposal?	None
Are there any Data Protection implications?	None arising directly. The Planning function is undertaken in accordance with all appropriate data protection requirements.

5. Risks Associated with the Proposed Decision

5.1 There are risks to the Authority and the National Park if the Planning system is not operating efficiently or effectively. However, there are limited risks arising from this report itself.

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigation
Variation in host authority performance overall may be subject to adverse media comment	Medium	Low	Officers monitor performance regularly and addressing performance variations is discussed, with actions agreed, at senior officer level. An annual update on planning performance to Members is an important part of performance monitoring and local government openness.

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Appendices I. Presentation – Annual Review of Planning Performance – Financial Year 2023/24

SDNPA Consultees	2. SDNPA Planning Newsletter, Spring 2024
External Consultees	Chief Executive; Monitoring Officer; Legal Services
Background Documents	None
	Web links:
	SDNPA Annual Monitoring Reports:
	https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/planning-policy/authority-monitoring-reports/