

PLANNING SERVICES DIVISION Development Control and Building Control  
Best Value Review ACTION PLAN March 2002

ACTION	RESPONSIBILITY	ADDITIONAL RESOURCES	TARGETS	OBJECTIVES
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APPENDIX 1

<p><b>1. Reduce the size of the Planning Committee</b></p>	<p>Committee/HPS</p>	<p>Minimal – Savings in resources and increase in efficiency</p>	<p>Smaller committee agreed and operational. Propose a 13 Member committee ( in line with policy committees) with full executive powers May 2002</p>	<p>Aim for consistency in decision-making, to avoid wrong decisions being made, reduce the number of appeals, reduce paperwork and expenses, increase flexibility, simplify arrangements for site visits.</p>
<p><b>2. Vision for planning and link to corporate objectives</b></p>	<p>HPS</p>	<p>Minimal</p>	<p>Vision published and communicated to staff - Immediate implementation</p>	<p>To develop a vision and linked key objectives for the Planning Division to be communicated to customers to ensure they are better informed about the planning service.</p>
<p><b>3. Introduce Member training as a pre-qualification for sitting on the</b></p>	<p>Committee/HPS</p>	<p>Minimal</p>	<p>Members attend basic training prior to sitting on Planning Committee</p>	<p>To ensure that Members of the Planning Committee have the requisite skills and understanding of planning to exercise decision</p>

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<p><b>Planning Committee</b></p>			<p>April 2003</p>	<p>making powers. Compulsory training sessions to run on a cycle to coincide with newly elected Members.</p>
<p><b>4. Open committees – introduction of public speaking at Planning Committee meetings</b></p>	<p>Committee/HPS</p>	<p>Minimal</p>	<p>Protocol prepared by end of October 2002  Public speaking introduced at Planning Committee Meetings December 2002</p>	<p>To ensure there is a participative, fair and transparent process for making planning decisions. To allow objectors, as well as applicants, an opportunity to put the case for and against a development directly to the planning committee.</p>
<p><b>5. Introduce a ‘cooling-off’ period for the Planning Committee</b></p>	<p>Committee/HPS</p>	<p>Minimal</p>	<p>Procedure incorporated into Code of Conduct September 2002</p>	<p>To avoid likelihood of unreasonable decisions being made by the committee that may result in a costs award</p>
<p><b>6. Introduce a procedure for site visits to be made in advance of Planning Committee</b></p>	<p>HPS</p>	<p>Minimal</p>	<p>New site visit procedure introduced September 2002</p>	<p>To ensure that no unnecessary delay is introduced to the decision making process. Delegate to the Head of Planning Services to decide on site visits, but Members to be able to request</p>

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meetings				visits within 14 days of the receipt of the Parish List.
7. Review level of delegations	DLPA/HPS	Minimal	BVPI 188 – 90% of applications to be determined under delegated authority September 2002	To ensure that only major applications are considered by the Planning Committee in accordance with BVPI 188.
8. Internal IT Requirements to be developed in a phased programme				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Install upgrade to CAPS – UNI-form Spatial, including Planning and Building Control.</li> </ul>	IT Client Manager	Significant – agreed by Council	New systems in place and operating by July 2002	To install the latest version of the UNI-form software which provides a more user-friendly map based interface for officers, is BS7666 compliant and is the first stage to public access to information over the Internet.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All planning constraints</li> </ul>	GIS Officer	Minimal, but utilising existing staff resources	All constraints available for on-line	To develop the information base of the GIS system, including the

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(conservation areas, SSSIs, etc.) to be included in the GIS system			access April 2003	replacement local plan and key policy links.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Aerial photographs of the district available and linked to the GIS</li> </ul>	GIS Officer	Minimal	Photographs available on-line for all staff April 2002	To increase the availability of on-line information for use by professional officers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Development monitoring and land availability information obtained through GIS and CAPS software</li> </ul>	HPS	Training costs of officers to be determined	New system operational to replace existing Access system April 2003	To provide more flexibility in reporting on land availability and to link system to GIS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Install UNI-form public access module (Phase 1)</li> </ul>	HPS/ IT Client Manager	To be determined, but primarily related to training for officers. Funds from the E-Government grant	Public access to planning system March 2003	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To provide up to date information to the public, inc. status of planning applications, plans and drawings etc. and to assist in improving the accessibility of the service</li> <li>To fulfil the requirements of the E-Government strategy for the delivery of planning and</li> </ol>

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				building control services.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interactive planning internet system that enables planning and building control applications to be submitted on-line (UNI-form public access Phase 2)</li> </ul>	HPS/ IT Client Manager	To be determined	System live March 2005	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To allow planning applications to be lodged at times convenient to the customer and to assist in improving the accessibility of the service</li> <li>To fulfil the requirements of the E-Government strategy for the delivery of planning and building control services.</li> </ol>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improve the availability and scope of information on the Intranet for officers and elected Members</li> </ul>	HPS/ IT Client Manager	Minimal	To run parallel with improvement programme for internet	To make best use of information technology to provide information about planning and building control to professional officers and elected Members.

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<p><b>9. Redesign planning reception in Acacia House. Consultant advice required prior to building works</b></p>	<p>Property Maintenance &amp; Highways Manager</p>	<p>Consultant – est. £2,500  Works – est. £20,000</p>	<p>Consultants report March 2003  Improvement work completed Mar 2004</p>	<p>To improve the customer interface, including private interview areas and IT provision, and to take account of the needs of the disabled (ambulatory, hearing, vision, etc.)</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Install a PC in the planning reception – available for use by members of the public to view application plans, maps, etc.</li> </ul>	<p>IT Client Manager</p>	<p>Cost of PC, software, installation and IT contract estimated at £2,500. Savings in rapid access for customers to information</p>	<p>PC installed and operational December 2002</p>	<p>To enable customers to easily view application information and be better informed about the progress of applications and the planning service generally.</p>
<p><b>10. Improve the level and timing of feedback of information to customers</b></p>				<p>The level and timing of feedback to customers was identified as being a key issue in the Planning Satisfaction Survey carried out in 2000. The objective is therefore to improve feedback to customers, particularly during the time applications are being processed</p>

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>DC – Planning Applications</li> </ul>	HPS	Providing more and regular information will have resource implications. Better IT systems and public access to application information will be key to improving availability of information	An improvement of 5% in the number of customers who considered they were kept fully informed March 2004	Improve feedback to customers during the application process
<b>11. Review of guidance leaflets, advice, etc. Applies to DC and BC. Review in two parts dealing with existing and then new leaflets/advice.</b>				

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Existing</li> </ul>	HPS	Minimal	Revised leaflets available to the public (hard copy and Internet) March 2002	To explain the operation of the planning system and building control in simple user-friendly language.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Decision Notice guidance on appeals, etc.</li> </ul>	HPS	Minimal	Leaflets available to the public (hard copy and Internet) March 2002	To explain applicants right of appeal in simple user-friendly language
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Flowchart to explain planning process</li> </ul>	HPS	Minimal – cost savings resulting from reduced officer time spent in explaining the system	Leaflets available to the public (hard copy and Internet) June 2002	To explain to applicants and consultees the various stages that will be followed in determining a planning application
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dummy application form and plans</li> </ul>	HPS	Minimal – cost savings resulting from reduced officer time spent in explaining the system	Displayed in planning reception (copy on Internet) June 2002	To assist prospective applicants to submit a complete and high quality planning application
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Building Control customer commitment</li> </ul>	BCM	Minimal	Leaflets available to the public(hard copy and Internet) April 2002	To explain to customers the level of service they can expect from the Building Control section



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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Planning application checklist</li> </ul>	HPS	Minimal – cost savings resulting from reduced officer time spent in explaining the system	Checklist available to the public (hard copy and Internet) June 2002	To enable prospective applicants to prepare a complete and high quality planning application
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Building Control – Making an application</li> </ul>	BCM	Minimal – cost savings resulting from reduced officer time spent in explaining the system	Leaflets available to the public (hard copy and Internet) June 2002	To enable prospective applicants to prepare a complete and high quality application
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Explaining the Local Plan</li> </ul>	HPS	Minimal	Leaflets available to the public (hard copy and Internet) September 2002	To help prospective applicants to understand the relationship between their proposal and the policies contained in the Local Plan.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review Code of Conduct for Planning Matters</li> </ul>	HLS	Minimal	Updated code published and issued May 2002	To update the existing Code of Conduct to fully reflect the modernising agenda for local government
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Code of Conduct for Planning Matters brochure</li> </ul>	Committee/HPS	Minimal	Brochure published (hard copy and Internet) – copy to	To enable customers to better understand the special role of elected Members of the Local

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			all Members of the Planning Committee at first meeting in each new Municipal Year. Copies to Parish/Town Councils. May 2002	Planning Authority when they take decisions in the Planning Committee
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Code of Conduct for Planning Matters – summary version</li> </ul>	HPS/HLS	Minimal	A4/A3 summary version of the code available to the public June 2002	To provide widely available a customer friendly summary of the code of conduct
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Code of Conduct for Planning Matters – summary version included in Planning Services Agenda</li> </ul>	Committee	Minimal	Include the summary version within the Planning Services agenda/schedule June 2002	To include the summary version of the code in the Planning Services agenda/schedule for the benefit of Members and customers.

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Introduce new planning application forms – Essex-wide initiative</li> </ul>	HPS	Minimal	Application forms available in hard copy and downloadable form from the Council's website July 2002	To provide a new customer friendly application form that is capable of being downloaded from the Internet or completed on-line.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Revised application forms folder</li> </ul>	HPS	Minimal – publication paid for by advertising	Revised folder available September 2002	Improvement to public relations and expression of professionalism
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>New Building Control procedures manual</li> </ul>	BCM	Minimal, but staff resource to prepare	Version 1 available in March 2003	To improve consistency and quality in dealing with building regulation applications
<p><b>To evaluate and utilise a broad range of outlets to publicise the planning service and to provide guidance on planning and building control issues including</b></p>	HPS		Initial evaluation to be undertaken by October 2002.	To ensure that information and guidance on planning matters and building control is widely available
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rochford District Council publications</li> </ul>	Corporate			To ensure that all Council publications are used to best

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Website – weekly list, parish list, application forms, progress of applications, appeals register, local plan information, links to other organisations, committee agenda, planning schedules and minutes.</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	HPS	Minimal since the majority of the information is already prepared	<p>Information available and accessible on the website</p> <p>Parish List and local plan information are available on the website. Update other information by July 2002.</p>	<p>advantage to promote information about planning and building control</p> <p>To develop the council’s website into a key source of information about planning and building control. See also the sections of the Action Plan dealing with the development of IT</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Posters</li> </ul>	HPS	Minimal	Posters produced when required	A simple cost-effective way to communicate information on planning and building control matters
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Libraries</li> </ul>	HPS	Minimal	To use libraries when appropriate for the	To make best use of the district’s libraries for the dissemination of information to residents and

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			dissemination of information	customers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Estate Agents Packs</li> </ul>	Planning Manager	Modest costs associated with producing information	Estate Agents Packs March 2003	To be pro-active in providing information on the Council's Planning services to prospective customers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Citizens Advice Bureaux</li> </ul>	Planning Administrative Officer	Minimal	Information on planning and building control made available to CAB December 2002	To ensure that the CAB has available up to date information about the planning and building control services, including points of contact, email addresses, etc.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Parish/Town Councils</li> </ul>	HPS	Minimal	All new leaflets to be sent to Parish/Town Councils when available. Parish/Town Councils to be kept informed about the development of	To ensure that Parish/Town Councils are kept fully up to date with planning and building control matters.

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Community Legal Services Initiative</li> </ul>	HLS	Minimal	Internet services. In place	To provide flexible, responsive access to legal information.
<b>12. Internal record keeping</b>				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review policy for the recording and archiving of information</li> </ul>	HPS/Planning Administrative Officer	Minimal	Policy reviewed and new arrangements in place. March 2003	To ensure that the Planning Division is making best use of available information and that the information is appropriately recorded, stored and easily accessible for future use
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Introduce arrangements for recording pre-application advice using the UNI-form system</li> </ul>	HPS/Planning Manager	Minimal – it is expected that better use of information from pre-application will have resource benefits for the application process	Pre-application advice recorded and linked to future planning application(s) June 2003	To ensure that pre-application discussions are properly recorded, linked to a property record and available to officers when a planning application is submitted

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<b>14. Staff training and Development</b>				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Team working and feedback</li> </ul>	HPS	From within resources of training budget	Training course for staff by September 2002.  Internal team building sessions from June 2002.	Provide staff with an enhanced toolkit of methods to improve team working and feedback mechanisms. This is in addition to training requirements identified through the PDR process.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Development control clinics to review new applications on a weekly basis</li> </ul>	Planning Manager	Minimal, but savings resulting from early assessment of possible issues	Fortnightly reviews from January 2002  Weekly reviews from May 2002	To identify any problem issues at an early stage and to contribute towards overall improved development control performance
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Better use of PDRs to establish training needs of staff and link to operational objectives of the division</li> </ul>	HPS	Training budget	Key performance targets assigned to individual case officers – target for percentage of recommendations	To ensure that training needs fully reflect the operational needs and objectives of the division

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			made within 5 weeks of receipt of application to be Contained within Case Officer PDR's March 2003	
<b>15. Introduce a development team approach</b>	HPS and Operational Management Team	Minimal – may be a saving by providing an integrated approach for prospective developers.	Development Team Approach in place for larger schemes October 2002	To provide new internal mechanisms for integrated service to customers proposing larger development schemes in the district. (More than 12 dwellings or 150 square metres floor area for commercial development)
<b>16. Review of the information presented in reception</b>			Information reviewed and amended by September 2002	To provide a more informative, professional & customer friendly environment in reception
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Performance standards</li> </ul>	HPS	Minimal	September 2002	



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• Organisation and committee structures	HPS	Minimal	September 2002	
• Members photos	Committee	Minimal	June 2002	
• Staff photos	Personnel	Minimal	June 2002	
• Performance indicator results for DC/BC and local plan	Planning Manager	Minimal	Quarterly	
<b>17. Introduce a customer feedback form to monitor ongoing satisfaction with the service</b>	HPS	Minimal	Form sent out with all decision notices from DC and BC seeking feedback on user satisfaction service delivery. Forms available in receptions September 2002	To enable changes to be made to service delivery where applicable that will result in customer benefits
<b>Undertake a comprehensive customer satisfaction survey as per DTLR requirements</b>	HPS	Internal staff resource	5% increase in customer satisfaction compared with survey results from 2000 – March 2004	To demonstrate that improvements have been made in the delivery of the planning service within Rochford.

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<b>18. Include a general information note on the local plan in planning application packs</b>	Local Plans	Minimal	Information note published and included in packs July 2002	To seek to demonstrate the links between the local plan and development control decisions
<b>19. Remove Ward Member names from planning schedule – Ward Members not automatically called as first speaker in committee</b>	HPS	Minimal	Names removed from the schedule May 2002	To avoid giving the public the perception that Ward Members are able to pre-judge applications (This is in conflict with the Code of Conduct)
<b>20. Remove requirement for a 7 day Ward Member consultation when objections are received to delegated applications</b>	HPS	Minimal	7 day Ward Member Consultation requirement removed.  May 2002	To ensure that delays in processing householder applications are kept to a minimum. Reduction in time taken to process delegated planning applications – local and national indicators apply

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<b>21. Remove requirement for Ward Member consultation when agreeing minor amendments to applications first determined by the Planning Committee</b>	HPS	Minimal	Remove requirement for Ward Member consultation when agreeing minor amendments to applications first determined by the Planning Committee  May 2002	To ensure that a decision on minor amendment requests can be made as quickly as possible
<b>22. Examine appropriateness of a fee for pre-application advice that would be deducted from a subsequent planning application</b>	HPS	Minimal	Decision taken about the introduction of a new charging arrangement. April 2003	To consider fully options for improving service delivery

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<p><b>23. Issues relating to the process for dealing with planning applications, including:</b></p>		<p>Minimal – part of ongoing process of continuous improvement</p>	<p>Reduction in time taken to process planning applications including registration and issue of decision notice</p>	<p>To seek to remove wasteful procedures from the application process and enable trained staff to deal with other planning matters</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Time taken to issue decision notice after decision reached</li> </ul>	<p>HPS</p>	<p>Minimal</p>	<p>June 2002 New local PI</p>	<p>To reduce the time taken to deliver a decision to the customer.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Time taken by individual case officers to prepare recommendations</li> </ul>	<p>Planning Manager</p>	<p>Minimal</p>	<p>55% of applications to reach recommendation stage within 5 weeks of receipt  From April 2002  New local PI</p>	<p>To provide a speedy service for customers and to ensure that local and national targets for processing planning applications are achieved.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Time taken to reach a decision on</li> </ul>	<p>HPS</p>	<p>Minimal</p>	<p>The national target for all applications</p>	<p>To introduce a step change in the speed with which planning</p>

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applications			(excluding major and minor commercial) is 80% in 8 weeks. New local PI of 55% of applications in 2002/03 and 60% in 2003/2004 in 7 weeks (excluding major and minor commercial).	applications are processed by the authority beyond the national target of 80%.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>More closely linking neighbour consultation letters with issue of site notices</li> </ul>	Planning Manager	Minimal	Consultation period no more than 21 days for any application  September 2002	To avoid any extension of the consultation period
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Remove the need for Parish/Town Council to automatically be sent all plans for householder applications</li> </ul>	HPS	Minimal – cost savings in staff time for what is a time-consuming administrative process	Remove current process for all householder application plans to be forwarded to relevant Parish / Town Council	To reduce time spent on wasteful administrative processes. Note, Parish Councils are still consulted on applications. Introduction of public access to the planning system will enable plans to be viewed over an Internet

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			June 2002	connection
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Procedure note to advise applicants to show plans to neighbours</li> </ul>	HPS	Minimal	Procedure note produced and issued to applicants June 2002	To reduce the likelihood of neighbour objections on householder applications in particular
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The neighbour consultation process – publish details of the LPA’s procedures</li> </ul>	HPS	Minimal	Details published in a leaflet and on the website July 2002	To explain the consultation arrangements followed by the authority for different types of planning application
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Introduce new arrangements for handling of Building Control requests for planning consent checks by Development Control</li> </ul>	Planning Manager	Additional administrative costs arising from the checking procedure	Revised procedures for planning consent checks by Development Control in place July 2002	To ensure that customers do not start works without the appropriate consents

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Providing applicants with specific time-scales to submit revisions to plans</li> </ul>	Planning Manager	Minimal	Applicants provided with specific time-scales for the submission of revised plans - standard time would be 14 days. May 2002	To enable planning applications to be determined within a reasonable timescale.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Send a copy of plan amendment requests to both agents and applicants</li> </ul>	Planning Manager	Minimal	Plan amendment requests sent to both agents and applicants May 2002	To keep applicants informed of actions being taken in respect of planning and building regulation applications where an agent is the main point of contact.
<p><b>25. Issues relating to the process for dealing with building regulation applications</b></p>				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consultations with the Fire Service</li> </ul>	BCM	Minimal	New procedure in operation by May 2002	To accelerate the consultation process with the Fire Service

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Basic plan check of Building Notice applications</li> </ul>	BCM	Minimal	New procedure in operation from April 2002	To improve the level of feedback to customers where plans are submitted with a Building Notice
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify sites not visited in the previous three months</li> </ul>	BCM	Minimal to identify sites, but staff resource issue for resultant visits	New procedure to use IT to generate list of sites by September 2002	To ensure that customers are provided with a comprehensive set of inspection visits.
26. Provide a feedback summary of all planning appeal decisions on a monthly basis, with information being published on the website.	Local Plans	Minimal	Summary prepared on a monthly basis. April 2002	To provide details of appeal decisions to Members and residents
<b>27. Organise a regular Focus Group on Planning</b>	HPS	Estimate about £500 per Focus Group	Focus Group to be organised once p.a.	To provide direct feedback on the delivery and perceptions of the planning service within the district.



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<b>28. Review contents of neighbour notification letters</b>	Planning Manager	Minimal	Updated neighbour consultation letters issued September 2002	To ensure that neighbour consultees are provided with all necessary information to enable them to comment on planning applications
<b>29. Inform neighbour consultees of the date applications are to be reported to committee</b>	Planning Manager	Additional administrative costs primarily resulting from staff time required to prepare and despatch letters	Neighbour consultees advised of the date applications to be reported to Committee July 2002	To enable neighbour consultees to attend planning committee when applications are determined
<b>30. Negotiate service level agreement with County Highways for the time taken to respond to consultations on major applications.</b>	HPS	Minimal	SLA in place September 2002	To ensure that highway information is provided in a timely fashion to enable major applications to be determined to an agreed timetable.