

Scrutiny request pro-forma	Request details
No. 17	
1. Member request	Councillor C Swain
2. Area of scrutiny requested and reasons for it	Enforcement. Why the list is so long; why easily assessed cases are not dealt with; whether the signing off procedure is a bottleneck; what criteria are used to prioritise assessment; why cases that have been concluded are not closed; why the 'closed' list is empty. Having cases outstanding for several years undermines public confidence in the process.
3. Indicate which part of the Committee's remit the request falls within	Matters involving the delivery of the Council's Priorities, and the review or scrutiny of decisions made or actions taken.
4. If other, give further details	This scrutiny request relates to the management and organisation of this function.
5. Has the matter been raised directly with Officers or another Committee?	No
6. If yes to 5, give further details including dates and any response	
7. Expected outcome of this requested scrutiny item	Rapid reduction in outstanding cases, especially those of long-standing.

Officer review and comments

1. It is confirmed that the nature of this request relates to an area within the remit of the Committee.
2. The subject of this request is similar to that previously submitted by Councillor Bassenger. At the January 2022 meeting of the Committee, it was agreed that there was little merit in scrutinising this process while steps were being taken to increase the resourcing of Planning Enforcement in line with a Policy review undertaken last year. A related request by former Councillor Jarvis as to the process for compliance with planning conditions was not taken forward for the same reason, while at the same time being treated as a request for information. It was however agreed that the process for the following up of planning conditions could be linked to any future scrutiny of the wider planning enforcement issue.
3. Since that time, the Council has recruited to the new support positions that were created and ordinarily it would be open to the Committee to pick this up again by way of reviewing how the increased resource is helping to deal with the enforcement workload. At the last meeting of the Performance, Governance and Audit Committee however the Director of Service Delivery gave a presentation on Planning Services performance and resources, and a further presentation is to be made to the Council on enforcement performance. In

the meantime, arrangements are available for informal meetings of Area Committees to be held for Members to work with Officers on the management of the work programme.

4. Councillor Swain believes that his and other Members' concerns may be allayed by a much deeper review of the effectiveness and efficiency of the enforcement process for dealing with the workload of cases, which would include –
 - Prioritisation of enforcement cases and the criteria used
 - Clearing up or resolving long-standing cases
 - Scope for delegating decision-making
 - Whether there is a 'bottleneck' in signing off actions
 - Scope for specialisation between Officers according to area or type of issue
 - Communication of outcomes with those involved in closed cases
 - Why certain cases could not have been resolved despite Covid restrictions
5. In part this will be a matter of providing information to understand the processes involved and how they are operated in order to judge the scope for more detailed scrutiny.
6. By way of update, the Enforcement resource has been strengthened during the course of this year, and the Lead Specialist (Development Management) is now largely focussed on Enforcement work in particular reducing the backlog and progressing cases in line with the revised Enforcement Policy. Draft statistical performance information ahead of the next reporting quarter indicates a significant reduction in the backlog with the closure of almost 170 cases since 1 April 2022. Apart from the seeking of information to enable Members to understand certain processes, this item now seems appropriate to be the subject of a watching brief to be overseen by the Working Group.